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November 1974

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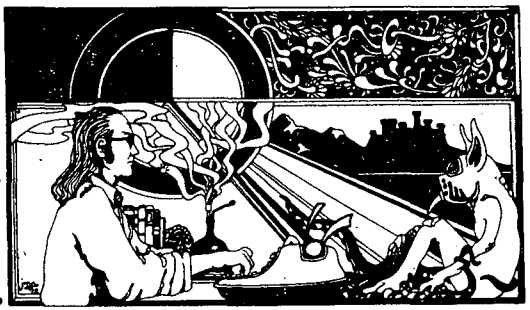
TED WHITE editorial



INSTANT REPLAY: Those of you who read my editorial in last month's AMAZING SF can skip this one—it's word-for-word identical. As for the rest of you. . .

ATTENTION, CONTRIBUTORS: After considerable soul-searching by the editorial staff, and after a variety of alternative proposals were discussed and discarded, I have decided to initiate a new policy for the submission of unsolicited manuscripts. Beginning October first, all such submissions must be accompanied by 25¢ in coin or stamps.

A number of factors precipitated this new policy. The most important are these:

1. As I have mentioned previously in these pages, we are forced by the economic realities of publishing to operate on a very slim budget. In fact what this has boiled down to is that most of our editorial staff is made up of unpaid volunteers. Chief among these volunteers is Grant Carrington, who in 1971 offered us his services as a "first reader". The first reader is the editor who initially sifts through story submissions, weeding out those which are obviously unsuitable, and passing on to me those he feels may be suitable for purchase and publication. Grant has provided many long hours of service to AMAZING and FANTASTIC, reading the bulk of the unsolicited manuscripts (the so-called "slush pile") over the past three years. Grant was instrumental in developing our present rejection slip—a "checklist" which helps those whose stories are rejected to understand *why* their stories came back. Such a rejection slip has demanded more of Grant than the usual "Sorry your story does not suit our needs" slip would—it has required of him careful consideration of each and every story he has rejected. (And letters from many of you have expressed appreciation for both this type of rejection slip and Grant's use of it.)

Although Grant has during this time been employed on a full-time basis, he has devoted many hours each week to reading manuscripts for us—and for *you*—often to the detriment of his own writing time, entirely gratis, his only payment his name on our masthead each issue.

Additionally, both Moshe Feder and Thomas Monteleone have also read manuscripts for us, equally unpaid.

At present all three are reading an average of four to six hundred manuscripts a month, with the lion's share falling on Grant.

2. Effective July, Grant will no longer be able to continue reading manuscripts for us. He is moving out of the area and intends to devote himself to writing on a full-time basis.

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3. I have had discussions with the Publisher about hiring a salaried first reader, but there is simply no money in the publishing budget. Indeed, recent cost increases—primarily paper, printing and shipping—have all but wiped out any surplus our recent cover-price hike might give us. (At the Publisher's initiative, we have also increased our basic payments for stories.) As yet it is too soon to know whether our price-increase will have an adverse affect upon our sales. Our present projections are based upon the hope that it will not; if it does, that will be one more factor to contend with.

FIVE YEARS AGO the unsolicited manuscripts were not read. They were returned, unread, by the publisher. At that time these magazines published only a small percentage of new stories (60% to 75% of the fiction was reprinted) and those were by "name" authors.

As part of my policy of revitalizing AMAZING and FANTASTIC the reprints were phased out. And at the same time we began searching out and publishing new authors. Several of these authors—Gordon Eklund, Geo. Alec Effinger—have since established themselves as major writers in our field. Others will join them. It is my belief that no magazine can subsist solely upon already established talent, and that it is the duty of every sf magazine to find and develop new authors. This we have done and will continue to do.

But up until now we have done so largely because of the willingness of a few people like Grant Carrington to freely donate their time to this. And Grant's decision to return to full-time writing simply brings into sharper relief a point which has been with us for some time: It is not enough to depend upon continued volunteer efforts and the goodwill of the Grant Carringtons of this world in order to handle story submissions.

THUS, OUR DECISION: A 25¢ "handling charge" must accompany each submission. We've tried to keep this charge simple—it's 25¢ whether you send us a two-page story or a novel—and relatively low. Twenty-five cents, after all, is usually less than you spend to mail your manuscript to us in the first place.

And we've tried to be fair. If your story is accepted, your 25¢ will be refunded with our letter of acceptance. If you are a member of the Science Fiction Writers of America, or qualify for membership in the SFWA, you need not include the 25¢. That is to say, if you're an already published, professional author, the charge does not apply to you.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR 25¢? It goes to the editor who reads your story. It is not kept by Ultimate Publications, Inc. It is, in fact, payment to the first reader (or readers) for his time and consideration of your manuscript. It is his small but tangible reward for his still largely volunteer service. (If he reads four hundred submissions a month, it means he will be paid $100 for that month. This is still a small sum for the work and time involved.)

Who will these editors be? Their names will appear on our masthead. They will include Thomas Monteleone (whose efforts up to now have been totally unpaid) and Richard Snead (whose "The Kozmic Kid" appeared in our July issue).

Will they reject your story simply in order to keep your 25¢? Frankly, no. We have discussed this point, in anticipation of such a complaint, and the unanimous feeling is that 25¢ is too little to haggle over. Each of our first readers is himself a writer and has strong convictions about how it feels to be a writer.

(Cont. on page 50)

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"I AM YOU!" snapped Victor contemptuously. "What kind of mystical nonsense is that?"

Tall gaunt Newton, sitting across the table from his smaller but more muscular companion in the mess hall, shrugged his shoulders saying, "It's a song I heard an old woman singing. I don't know what it means."

After an unaccountable absense from our field, Ray Nelson made his return with "The City of the Crocodile" in our March issue. Now, abandoning for the moment the historical fantasy series launched with that story, Nelson turns his attention to a long-favorite theme: revolution. What he has to say on the subject will offer little encouragement to would-be revolutionaries who have sometimes regarded him as their guru, but presents an insight all too appropriate to our times. . .

A SONG ON THE RISING WIND

R. FARADAY NELSON

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

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"Well I know. It's a drug, a poison, a delusion! It's an anesthetic for the revolutionary spirit! Can you imagine saying 'I am you' to a techman? To a security policeman?"

"Maybe not." Newton paused doubtfully. "Especially since you still haven't told me . . ."

"What it means? It's nothing but more of that universal brotherhood garbage."

Newton raised his eyebrows. "But Victor, I thought you believed in universal brotherhood yourself."

"Of course, but that comes after the overthrow of the Techmen. That comes after the establishment of the classless society, when humanity is no longer divided into the Working Class and the Unemployables. This madman Baboo thinks we can have universal brotherhood right now, today!"

"So Baboo is a real person?"

"Of course. Didn't you know?"

"No, I didn't. The way people talked about him, I thought he was a myth, like Paul Bunyan and . . ."

"You were better off not knowing. He's a crackpot, a real nut, but I must admit he sure can write music. His songs have joined our movement, but he hasn't. He laughs at us, can you imagine? Laughs!" Victor glared into his oatmeal as if the thought of Baboo had made him lose his appetite.

"All the same, I'd like to meet him."

"Really? All right, Newton, I'll introduce you to him."

THE NEXT DAY two yellow-robed men made their way through an out-of-the-way passage. Neither man spoke, and they walked softly, as if afraid of being heard. Finally they stopped in front of a large air-conditioning vent. The shorter of the two, the one with the club foot, looked carefully both ways, then took out a key and opened the grating that covered the vent. He climbed into the airshaft and motioned the other, the tall thin one, to follow.

"Come on, Newton," he whispered.

When they were both inside, Victor closed the grate behind them and locked it. Still taking care not to make any noise, they padded down the tube into the steadily darkening shadows. When they rounded a bend in the tube they were in absolute darkness. A cold draft rushed by them constantly, tugging at their thin robes, almost freezing them. A steady mumur of distant voices came to them from all directions and somewhere in the distance they could hear the whir of a giant fan.

Victor laid a restraining hand on Newton's arm and hissed, "Not so fast, you idiot."

A tiny spot of light appeared. Victor had a miniature flashlight. He pointed it up ahead of him and Newton saw that the passage they were in led into a larger pas-

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sage, a vertical one.

"If you had stepped into that shaft in the dark," muttered Victor, "you wouldn't have stopped falling for two hundred and four stories. I hope you're not afraid of heights."

In the dim light of the tiny flash, Newton shook his head, but actually the thought of that two hundred and four story drop gave him a queasy feeling in his stomach.

"That's good," said Victor softly, "because now we're going to have to climb up the side of that shaft with nothing to hang onto but a knotted rope."

"Victor, wait."

"What's wrong?"

"Er . . . nothing."

The air that came rushing up the large vertical shaft smelled faintly of ozone. It was ionized because ionized air was supposed to improve morale.

Victor reached out into the shaft and located the knotted rope that hung down from somewhere in the darkness above, then handed it to Newton and said, "I'm going up first. If you lose your grip I want you to be under me, not above." He turned out the light and absolute darkness returned, but Newton knew Victor had started up the rope by the way the rope jerked and tugged in his hands, and by the sound of Victor's labored breathing somewhere higher up on the wall of the shaft.

Taking a deep breath, Newton started up the rope after him.

THE FLOOR that Baboo lived on was exactly the same in almost every detail to the floor Newton lived on. Newton thought, *it's probably like this all over the Unemployables' Dorms.* Even the people looked the same, all dressed in the same yellow robes, both male and female, both young and old, and all wearing the same crew haircuts, so nobody noticed Newton and Victor as they elbowed their way through the crowd. Several times they passed security policemen and members of the Techman staff without the slightest incident.

When Newton remarked on this to Victor in a guarded undertone, Victor grinned and said, "Even if one of them did spot us, I don't think he'd say anything."

"Why not?"

"They're afraid of us, Newton my boy. Haven't you noticed that by now? They're sick with fear of us, and not without reason I assure you. When one of them gets out of line, he sometimes meets with an . . . er . . . accident, a fatal accident, like maybe a filing cabinet falls on him or something."

Newton shuddered, but at the same time he realized that Victor's underground movement might not be as futile and helpless as he had previously thought.

When they found Baboo he was alone in his bunkroom, lazily playing a huge homemade stringed in-

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strument. Newton sized him up as they walked toward him.

Baboo was a powerful muscular very black negro. Even his balding head and slightly bulging stomach did not detract from the overall impression of physical strength, as if he were a retired weight lifter or wrestler . . . yet there was something about his face, a look of tired wistful amusement, that made Newton feel that in spite of his great strength; or perhaps because of it, he was unusually gentle and understanding, the sort of person people always turn to in times of trouble.

"Hello, Victor," said Baboo without looking up from his playing. There were twelve strings on the instrument and Baboo played it with a deft sure touch born of long practice, a little rubber-headed hammer in one hand and a fountain pen in the other which he used somewhat like a Hawaiian guitar slide. Now and then he struck off harmonics from the strings with the tips of his fingers. The tone of the instrument was soft, sad and sweet, a little like a harp and a little like a guitar and even, in the sliding notes, a little like a gypsy violin or the funky voice of an old-time blues singer. Newton had never heard anything like it before, and it held him spellbound. He recognized, under the cascade of shimmering figurations, one of the songs he'd heard people singing, "Join Hands", but now that simple tune had been transformed into something unearthly, hypnotic.

"I . . . I'd like to learn to play that," said Newton hesitantly.

"Okay," said Baboo, smiling a little, "I'll teach you."

"This is my friend, Newton," said Victor to Baboo.

Baboo stopped playing and said, "My name is Bob Osborn, but everybody calls me Baboo."

Newton and Baboo shook hands.

"Baboo's quite a celebrity, Newton," said Victor. "You're lucky to be in the same building with him. He's famous, no kidding. Everywhere there are Uns, they sing his songs."

Baboo grinned. "My songs get around a lot more than I do. I haven't been off this floor, let alone out of this building, for fifteen years."

"When are you going to join the Movement, Baboo?" asked Victor, half-joking, half-serious.

"Never," answered Baboo quietly.

"I don't understand you, Baboo." Victor was frowning. "You agree with us on almost every point, yet still you hold out. Your songs are full of stuff about 'joining hands' and the Union of Man, but you yourself insist on standing alone. Haven't you ever heard the old saying, 'In union there is strength'?"

With a twinkle in his eye, Baboo responded, "If I joined you I would not grow stronger, but weaker. Alone, men can become

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geniuses or saints. Joined together they are only mobs and armies."

Victor licked his lips, preparing an apt reply. Newton realized that this was only the latest episode in a long, long debate between the two men. They had each long ago given up all hope of converting the other, but still they carried on the argument for the sport of it, as a friendly battle of wits.

"But it's mobs and armies," said Victor, "that will bring about the world you dream of and sing about."

"By violence and killing you expect to create a world of brotherhood and love?" demanded Baboo, laughing. "Love thy neighbor . . . *or else!*"

"Always jokes! Always the big ha ha!" Now Victor was really annoyed. "Can't you ever be serious? How can we carry on an intelligent discussion if you keep spouting wisecracks and absurdities?"

Baboo laughed again, then said teasingly, "Develop a taste for the absurd, Victor. Only then can you love human beings."

Victor turned to Newton, throwing up his hands in mock despair.

"You see, Newton? What did I tell you? He laughs at us. Everybody thinks Baboo is some kind of holy man, a reincarnation of Buddha or something, but he's just a wise guy, a clown!"

Baboo, grinning, nodded his head in agreement. "If the lion is the king of the beasts," said the big negro, "then Man is the court jester."

"There he goes again!" cried Victor. "You see? What did I tell you?"

Baboo turned his attention once again to his strange musical instrument and struck off a few random harmonics. Victor, seeing this, launched into a real tirade. "That's all he ever does all day long, year in and year out! He just sits and plays that idotic poom-poom. It's made out of the remains of an old discarded piano . . . just a mess of junk, really."

"The staff of this institution," explained Baboo to Newton, "wanted me to be happy, they said, so I told them I was happy right here playing the old poom-poom. They fussed and carried on, but after a while they decided I was harmless and went off and left me alone to sing the songs of my people in peace."

"Your people?" asked Newton. "You mean the black people?"

Baboo shook his head, still toying with the poom-poom.

"No, these days there are black men on the top as well as on the bottom. My people are the ones on the bottom, the losers. Losers can be black men, but they can just as easily be Jews, Mexicans or American Indians . . . Chinamen or Hindu untouchables. There always have been losers and there always will be losers. You can't have winners without 'em."

"If you love the losers so much,

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why don't you join us and do something to help them?" demanded Victor.

Baboo looked at Victor sadly for a moment, then sighed. "You don't really want to help the losers, Victor. You just want to become one of the winners."

PICTURE A NEAT, well-furnished office with a big picture window that opens out onto a small balcony. The lights are off, but the room is dimly lit from the gray feeble light that filters in through the window. It is mid-afternoon and outside it is raining. Now and then a cold wet wind sweeps in through the partly opened window and sets the curtains flapping, even threatens to blow the papers off the desk, but nobody closes the window.

Perhaps there is nobody there.

Wait, yes there is.

A little fat man sits motionless in a contour chair behind the desk, gazing out the window. He is dressed all in black except for his white turn-around clerical collar.

It's Bill, the Interfaith Chaplain.

But something's wrong. Where's that broad friendly smile the Uns are used to seeing on his face? Is this the way he always looks when nobody is watching him? Withdrawn? Depressed? Lonely?

What's wrong, Bill?

Let's glance into his mind and see.

It's true. He's lonely. He's always lonely these days. Nobody ever comes to see him voluntarily. He must always send for them, and then they never confide in him. Sometimes, even if he sends for them they don't come, though they know he will report this to Police Captain Clark. What Bill values most in life is "being liked", yet for some reason most people seem to dislike him on sight. Even Captain Clark barely puts up with him. He's always so busy, Captain Clark is. Bill calls him up on the videophone a lot, but Captain Clark always cuts the conversation short unless it's about business. Normandy Taylor, the recreation director, hates Bill and tells him so. "You make me sick to my stomach," she says sometimes, but then she is a Lesbian and hates all men, more or less. The rest of the staff are either too high or too low for Bill, or unsuitable for some other reason.

The trustys all give him the big hello, but he knows they are just buttering him up to protect their positions. He knows how they talk about him behind his back, how they laugh at him and make him the protagonist in their dirty jokes. There is another Chaplain Bill they've created that belongs to them, that they have built a fantastic mythology about . . . a pompous stupid lying monster. They've stolen Bill's identity and pasted it onto their monster, and now that monster is more real to

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them than the real Bill. They don't know the real Bill. They don't want to know him. That would spoil the fun. They don't want to know their joke-man can suffer because then he wouldn't be funny anymore.

Often Bill finds himself playing the role they have created for him, acting the part of their monster without being aware of it until, with a start, he brings himself up short, choked with shame and horror. There is a perverse demon in him that drives him to do what people expect him to do, no matter how degrading that may be. "If you do as they want you to," says the demon, "maybe they will like you," but they never do.

Bill is a pest and he knows he is a pest.

He tags after people, bothering them, clinging to them, driving them crazy, but he can't help himself. "Better to be insufferable than suffering," says the demon.

Bill asks himself, "Where do the Uns go when they want to talk to someone about their troubles?" He knows the answer. His spies have told him. They go to Baboo. They tell Baboo everything and listen to Baboo's stupid blatherings as if that black bastard were God in a Burning Bush.

Baboo!

Bill's face grows pale, his eyes narrow, his breathing becomes labored. He grips the arms of his chair with all his pudgy little might.

Then he speaks to the empty room, his teeth bared like the fangs of an animal.

"This place isn't big enough for two saviours," he growls.

IN THE WEEKS that followed Newton overcame completely his fear of the airshaft and made the climb up to Baboo's floor and back several times. Victor lent him the keys to the grating doors in return for having Newton deliver word-of-mouth messages to certain members of the underground on that floor.

Even though he acted as Victor's messenger, Newton did not regard himself as a member of the "Movement". He only did what he did because there was no other way he could get to see Baboo, and for some reason he could not himself clearly define, he *had* to see Baboo.

Actually, without fully realizing it, Newton had become a disciple. He told himself, "I'm learning how to play the poom-poom, that's all," but it was actually something quite different that drew him to Baboo. It was Baboo's philosophy.

And the reason that philosophy was so attractive was that it seemed to provide a rational and systematic support for Newton's long-standing emotional retreat from the world, from commitment, from caring. It transformed, by the magic of words, Newton's alienation into holy detachment, his borderline schizo-

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phrenia into spirituality. It provided him with a feeling of deep satisfaction, the satisfaction of believing that he had been right all along. While the enchantment lasted, it gave Newton a golden key to all spiritual doors and answers to all questions.

In Baboo the most extreme opposites met and were reconciled or transcended.

"There are two different basic philosophies of life for two basically different life situations," said Baboo as he showed Newton how to play a new chord on the poom-poom. "Determinism for the losers, and free will for the winners."

Or another time he said, "This is life. There are the winners and there are the losers and there is the war between them."

But the wise man must take no part in that war because, "In the end we are all losers. Life itself is a game in which to win is only not to lose too soon."

Life is simple for the True Believer, even if what he so devoutly believes in, so fanatically and single-mindedly worships, is Nothing.

Most important of all, this new philosophy gave him a way to get rid of his girl friend, a bright-eyed little hunchback named Mara.

When she screamed her clichés at him . . . "You're rejecting me! You don't love me because I'm a hunchback!" he was able to reply, "I'm not rejecting you, just renouncing you. There are, you know, higher things than mere fleshly pleasures."

AFTER HOURS Captain Clark and Normandy Taylor often shared a drink in Normandy's room. They were old friends and, in a way, loved each other, but they would never be what is called "lovers." Normandy found only members of her own sex attractive in a sexual way, and Captain Clark was a married man who had never once, in fifteen years of married life marred by many separations, been unfaithful to his wife. Yet, as I say, they loved each other, in a quiet unspoken way.

"Victor is doing a good job of recruiting," mused Captain Clark as he sat back in an overstuffed chair and held his drink up to the light. "It's only a matter of time before he has the whole floor in the underground."

"Why don't you arrest him then?" demanded Normandy, coming in from the kitchenette after refilling her own glass. She drank rather heavily for a physical education instructor.

"We can't prove anything," sighed the police captain. "We can't arrest anyone unless we can prove something in court."

"Pay off some informers. Send in some finks. Frame him." Normandy paced back and forth, one hand holding her drink, the other gesturing emphatically. "You can nail him somehow."

"I have no orders to do any-

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thing like that."

"Do it on your own then."

Captain Clark sighed again and shook his head. "I can't afford to do that, Norm. I'd lose my job, and then I'd be an Un myself. In a few more months I'll be up for retirement. I can't throw that away so lightly . . . and I have the wife and kids to think of."

"Listen," growled Normandy, looming over the slouching police officer. "If somebody doesn't do something soon, those animals are going to stampede and trample us all. I'm out among them every day. I can feel their hatred all around me like a poisonous fog. So help me God, I'm afraid to turn my back on them."

"You don't understand, Norm. Those so-called 'animals' aren't criminals or, for the most part, even insane. They haven't committed any crime, let alone been convicted of any. They're not unemployable because they're evil. They're unemployable because, for some reason or another, there's nothing they can do quite well enough to compete out there." He gestured vaguely in the direction of the outside world. "Why, if there were any voting booths in here, they could vote! Did you know that some of them have been demanding the right to vote?"

"And I suppose you'd like to let them vote?" she said contemptuously.

"I don't know, Norm. I just don't know. If I was ordered to . . ."

Normandy threw herself into an overstuffed chair and ran her powerful fingers through her short-cropped red hair.

"They don't understand, up there," she said. "The big brass just doesn't understand how it is down here in the dorms. We're supposed to take care of the Uns, keep them happy, wet nurse them and change their diapers for them, but all these animals want to do in return is kill us. They want to kill us, Cap. Do you realize that?"

Captain Clark nodded sadly and drained his glass.

NEWTON HAD REJECTED HER. Mara could live with that, but she could not go on sharing the same bunkroom with him. She had to move, but this she could not do without permission.

She asked Normandy for help, but Normandy said, "You can move in with me."

"I know what you mean," said Mara. "I can't do that. I'm not . . . gay."

Normandy said, "You'll change your mind after a while."

She did not give up. The next day she asked to see Captain Clark, but he refused to see her and she suspected that Normandy had gotten to him first.

Still she did not give up. Instead she went with Victor to see Baboo, and even the frightening climb up the airshaft on the knotted rope could not discourage

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her.

Victor left her with Baboo and went on about his business.

Baboo stopped playing and, after a strained exchange of introductions, waited expectantly for her to speak.

"I want a job," she said after a long silence.

"Who doesn't?" countered Baboo, grinning.

"I . . . I'll work for substandard wages."

"Even if you worked for free, they'd still be losing money by hiring you," sighed Baboo. "There's nothing at all you can do that a machine can't do cheaper and better." He touched the strings of the poom-poom, producing a few random muffled tones.

"I need money, Baboo. Not much. Just enough to show means, to prove I'm not really unemployable."

"You want to get out of here, gal?"

"I've *got* to get out!"

"But why? They are prisoners out there too, you know."

"Then you can't help me?" Her voice was barely audible.

"I *am* helping you, gal," said Baboo, frowning. "I'm helping you to understand how things are."

"You don't understand *anything*!" cried Mara as she angrily turned away and walked down the aisle toward the door.

"Wait!" called a voice from one of the other bunks, a voice cracked and shrill with age. Mara stopped and glanced over in the direction of the voice. A gaunt unshaven old man lay there beckoning for her to come closer. She stepped to the edge of his bunk and leaned over him.

"I don't want Baboo to hear," he whispered coyly.

Baboo, however, had gone back to playing the poom-poom and singing softly to himself. Even if he was paying attention he would be too far away to eavesdrop.

"What is it?" whispered Mara, falling in with the old man's mood of secrecy.

"You want to earn a little money to get yourself out of here?" he said, so softly she could hardly hear him.

"I sure do."

"Listen, kid. My pals and I, we ain't got much, but if we put our money together . . ."

"What do I have to do?" she asked slowly.

When he reached up and clutched her shoulder in a painfully strong grip, his toothless gums working, his stinking breath in her face, she knew what he wanted without being told.

It must have been hope that blinded her, because she had been doing what the old man and his friends asked a day and a half before she was certain that they didn't have a penny between them.

As she left, the old man said apologetically, "Gee kid, I'm awful sorry, but you know how it

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is."

It's true, she thought bitterly, *I finally really know how it is.*

CHAPLAIN BILL was astonished.

One of the inmates had actually requested an interview. Unheard of!

"Send her in," said the fat little man to his intercom.

The thin sliding panel opened to admit her, then slid shut behind her. Mara walked slowly to the center of the room, her eyes averted. She looked tired and somehow much older than Bill had remembered her as being, but then, he had never really known her, just seen her around. He was sure that she hadn't been so sloppy before though. Before, her hair had been neatly trimmed and her robe spotlessly clean, not like this. He shuddered.

"Have a chair, my child," he said gently.

Mara sat down, still not looking at him.

"Now, what can I do for you?" He folded his hands on his stomach. The tape recorder was on. He felt calm and rested. All was in readiness for a successful little talk on spiritual matters.

"I've got to get out of here," she began in a low voice. "You're my last chance."

"Well, you know that once you get into an Un dorm, it's no easy matter to get out again. Do you have some sort of gainful employment or some source of regular income?"

After a pause she answered, "No."

"Then I'm afraid you'll just have to adjust to the Un life as best you can. I realize it isn't all peaches and cream but . . ."

"Just get me transferred to a different building, or even just a different floor or wing. Anyplace, so long as it isn't here!"

She stood up again and began pacing the floor. Bill watched her as he sat in his contour chair, his head turning to follow her as if he were watching a tennis match. He pursed his lips and said, "What seems to be the trouble? Men?"

"A man."

"That thin fellow, Newton?"

"That's right."

"Well, young lady, are you sure a transfer would really help? You might find another Newton type of fellow waiting for you in your new location."

"Don't say that," she said hopelessly, stopping in front of the open picture window. With a jolt Bill realized that from where she stood she could make a quick dash and vault the railing of his little balcony before he had a chance to get up from his chair, and it was a long way down. He cleared his throat nervously. "Have a chair, won't you please? I'm sure we can work something out."

She didn't move, just stood gazing out at the bright sunlight, the sky and the tall puffy white cotten clouds. Bill realized that this was

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probably the first time she had seen the sky since she had come to the dorms. Perhaps that was why she stood there so still, looking out the window.

"Really my dear. Do be seated. It's easier to talk that way, you know." It certainly wouldn't look good on his service record, someone killing herself by jumping out the window of her spiritual councilor. He could almost hear what they would say in the front office. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Yes indeed.

To Bill's immense relief she at last turned away from the window and sat down, her head drooping listlessly. As unobtrusively as possible, Bill got up and stood between her and the window, his professional smile now firmly in place. He opened the folder he had in his hands, her file, all in order, and looked it over. There was a note in it from Captain Clark. "Refuse transfer; Clark." As usual with Clark, a curt order. No explanation. No elaboration. Not even a perfunctory show of politeness. That was what hurt. The bastard didn't even feel the need to be decent about his bossiness. What the police department says, goes. The only function of the Church, in Clark's eyes, was to gather information. Well, we'll see about that! This poor defenseless girl had come to him for help, and that was something that didn't happen every day. That was Clark's fault, too. The Uns knew Bill was forced to report what they said. That's why they never told him anything. This time Clark was going to get a little surprise.

"I'm going to try to help you," he said, and this time Bill was thinking of how furious Captain Clark was going to be, so the professional smile was replaced by a real one. "I'll have to pull a few strings in the front office, but I think I can safely say that I'll have you out of your present quarters within a week."

Mara raised her head and stared at him in stunned disbelief.

"Just like that?"

"Just like that," said Bill, grinning from ear to ear.

"And what do you want from me in return?" He could tell by the tone of her voice that she had come prepared to pay for the transfer with the loan of her "fair white body." He toyed with the idea but rejected it. What was mere sex compared to the pleasure of playing God?

"I want nothing at all from you, my child," he said delightedly. "I am happy to be of service. After all, that's my job, isn't it?"

TWO MEN sat together in absolute silence in absolute darkness.

Finally one of them spoke. "The dorms are ready. All around the world, they're ready."

"Patience," said the second softly. "They must wait until the right moment. We need an incident, an atrocity, something to fire the imagination of those Uns

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who may want to hang back at the last minute. At the right moment, I'll give the signal."

"What will the signal be?"

"I'll turn on the interference transmitters. Every TV, every stereovision and every radio station on this planet will be jammed."

"But then how will we communicate with each other?"

"We won't have to. Our plans are simple enough to carry out without communication. Kill everyone who isn't wearing the Un robe and haircut."

"And when will you give the signal?"

"Perhaps this week. Perhaps the next. There's a man named Victor who has a plan . . ."

CAPTAIN CLARK frowned into his drink.

"I tried to get an order for the arrest of our friend Victor," he said.

"It's about time," replied Normandy. As usual she was drinking too much, and now she was taking pills too. She had been a calm, self-possessed woman once, long ago. Now she had to take pills all the time, and even with the pills . . .

"They turned me down," said Captain Clark tonelessly.

"What?"

Captain Clark shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of hopelessness. "Someone else got to them first. They think the ringleader in this dorm is this Baboo fellow. I'll have to bring him in instead."

"But that would be a ghastly mistake. Baboo's no revolutionary, but he is some sort of saint to these people in the dorms. He's known around the world because of his idiotic songs. If we lay a finger on Baboo, it might touch off a world-wide rebellion. Think, Cap! There's three of them for every one of us!" She was afraid now, and hated herself for it.

"What do you think of Chaplain Bill?" asked Captain Clark as Normandy threw herself into a chair.

"Is he the one who transferred that cute little hunchback . . . what's her name? Mara."

"So they say." He paused. "Has it ever struck you that he might have gone over to the Uns? That he might be setting this up for them?"

"What makes you say that?"

"The grapevine has it that good old Bill is the one who set them after Baboo . . . and can you tell me one earthly reason why a man like him would dare to go over my head to get a transfer for an Un that we wanted to keep right here?"

"Sooner or later," she said wistfully, "she would have . . . Christ, Cap! I never did like that holy hippo. Now I hate him! But I don't think he's got the guts to cross over. He's just playing petty office politics with all our lives, that's all."

"Then he's one of us?" asked

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Clark uncertainly. "The best? The fittest? Homo superior? Is the whole purpose of our society keeping creatures like him on top and everyone else on the bottom?"

"You've been drinking too much, Cap." She briefly touched his cheek with her fingertips. "If you don't get a grip on yourself you might cross over yourself."

"Maybe so, maybe so," he admitted, slowly shaking his head as if trying to clear it. For a long time he sat silent, head drooping, while Normandy sat across from him, watching him with sadness and infinite weariness.

VICTOR, thought Newton, *is my friend.*

Why else would that club-footed little red risk his neck stealing whiskey for Newton from the Techman's Mess Hall?

And wasn't it Victor who had introduced Newton to the folk-singer, Greta Berg? Victor had noticed that Newton was depressed, that he sometimes missed Mara even though he had himself driven her away. Victor knew Newton needed a woman.

Greta was a woman, not a mere girl like Mara.

Greta was more. She was a mother. Her brat, Danny, who was too smart for his own good, was always hanging around. In fact that was the main drawback to Greta. The other drawbacks were her singing and guitar playing, and her constant talk about how she was going to "make a comeback" someday, how she was going to sing her way out of the dorms and become a big star.

Yes, Victor was his friend. Why else would Victor take such a personal interest in him? Newton never noticed that he was the only person in his bunkroom who had not yet joined the underground.

It wasn't hard for Newton to get drunk, and when drunk there were a lot of things he didn't notice.

One bottle of whiskey did the job. He didn't know why, but it was true. Just one little bottle and he was plastered; elementally, elliptically, eloquently plastered!

And when he went to visit Greta and Danny, he usually was plastered. He admitted it. Hell, he was proud of it. If he had a bottle of good whiskey what was he supposed to do with it? Perfume his armpits?

When he went to see her for what turned out to be the last time, Greta was singing as usual. A regular castrated canary. Well, maybe she had a voice, but those songs!

"The Happy Un."

And how about "My Little Un Baby and Me"?

They were all just fake tin-pan-alley garbage designed to relieve the guilt feelings of the techs, if they had any guilt feelings, which Newton doubted.

If he was on top, Newton thought, he wouldn't have any

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guilt feelings, and if he did he'd invent a philosophy that said he belonged there so fast it'd make your head spin. And he'd get the churches to back up his philosophy, too. They knew which side their bread was buttered on. Always had.

Newton listened a while to Greta's singing without saying anything. He had more patience than the other poor slobs in her bunkroom. They started crabbing every time she opened her mouth.

Finally he couldn't stand it a moment longer. He'd had it! He pushed through the crowd of hecklers and yelled, "Shut up, you bitch! Keep that phony bull to yourself! This is how it really is!"

He started singing one of Baboo's songs, "Join Hands."

He didn't have much of a voice. If fact, it had been said that he sounded like a frog with a frog in its throat, but he really got the crowd on his side. They joined in on the chorus and when he was done they cheered themselves hoarse. He had to sing the whole thing over for an encore.

The words to Baboo's songs were simple, and in a way you might even say they were a little stupid, but they were true! They told about things the way they really were. You could believe in what you sung, and that made a big difference in the singing. Even a singer with hardly any voice at all could sound good if he sung with conviction.

Newton had no sooner finished his encore when Greta slapped his face with all her might.

Smack!

Newton looked at her, startled, suddenly sober. Never in his life had he seen such hatred as he saw at that moment radiating from her contorted face. She didn't look like a human being, but more like a rabid dog.

Newton thought, *If she could, she'd kill me on the spot!*

"I'm sorry, Greta, if I . . ." he began.

He couldn't decide whether to stand his ground or run for it, but when he saw her pick up her guitar as if it were a spiked club, he made up his mind. He ran for it! He didn't want her to smash that guitar over his head. After all, it was a valuable instrument.

Everyone was howling with laughter, but he didn't care. He headed for the exit as fast as he could scramble, with Greta right behind him. Even drunk he outran her easily once they got out in the hall. She gave up when she saw she couldn't catch him and had to content herself with shouting insults after him until he was out of sight.

Wait now. That's not all.

The next day, when he passed her bunkroom door, he heard her practicing again, only this time she was singing "Join Hands."

ONE DAY, a week before the revolution that was to mean death for three quarters of the world's population, that would plunge the

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world into a new dark age where scientists and technical engineers would be burned as witches had once been burned, a murderer came and stood before Baboo with a question. (Many people came to Baboo with questions.)

"I have come from far away," said the murderer. . .

"How far?" asked Baboo, sitting on his cot, the lower deck of a double decker, as a king sits on a throne, as a judge sits on the bench of justice, as a priest sits in a confessional booth.

"From the other end of this building, many miles from here." The murderer was unshaven, dirty, gaunt, and his yellow robe was torn. "I must talk to you."

"Why me?"

"They say you are a wise man. They say you are the wisest man in the dorms. Everyone sings your songs. Everyone believes in them . . . and you. If anyone anywhere can answer my question, you can."

"What is the question?" Baboo spoke gently.

The murderer paused, framing his question carefully. "Is it ever good . . . to kill a man?"

Baboo realized then that he was speaking to a killer. "No, it's never good."

The murderer was not satisfied. "Not even when someone threatens your life?"

"Not even then."

"But what if someone threatens not only your life, but the lives of many others?" Guilt made the man desperate.

Baboo considered a long time, then said, weighing each word, "A man can never avoid death. We all die, sooner or later. But a man can avoid being a murderer. He need not ever kill another man. To avoid death, to save others from death, that is not within a man's power. But to avoid killing another man . . . that is within his power, if he has the will."

This was not the answer the man wanted, so he paused only a moment before pressing yet another question. "Have you never killed anyone?"

"Never."

"But Mister Baboo, you must have wished to kill! If you're human you must sometime have wanted to kill someone!"

For the first time Baboo's god-like calm was slightly shaken. "Yes . . . there have been times."

"And if you've wanted to kill, don't you think a situation might arise when that desire became too strong for you?"

There were others around. They fell silent, waiting for Baboo's answer. He glanced around, and could see in their faces that they wanted him to answer no. But that would not be honest. Baboo had not become Baboo by telling lies, no matter how well-loved the lies might be.

"It's possible," said Baboo. There was a murmur of consternation from the crowd, but Baboo went on, "In the kind of situations you are speaking of, a man never knows what he will do in advance.

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The situation arrives. You act. And only then do you learn, perhaps to your own surprise, what you really believe."

The murderer was delighted. "I knew it! I knew you would understand! Nobody else would understand that, only you!" He spoke as if he'd been suddenly released from prison. "I wasn't sure before . . . but now I know. You are as wise as everyone says you are!"

The murderer turned away.

"Wait!" called Baboo, raising his hand, but the man had already vanished into the crowd. There was more to be said . . . or was there? Baboo frowned, thiking, *That was the right answer for that one man, and for me, but for the others who heard . . . was it the right answer for them?* He wished, for a moment, he'd never gotten started in this holy man game. It wasn't as easy as some people might think. There was always so much pressure. And his words always got changed as soon as they left his mouth. Each listener changed them to suit some preconceived idea, some emotional need. He shook his head slowly from side to side, murmuring, "No more. No more today."

Those who were waiting in line groaned with disappointment, but they saw the sag in the black giant's shoulders and had pity on him. They thought they could always come back tomorrow. They did not know how few tomorrows remained.

As the crowd melted away, Baboo picked up his poom-poom and began to play. He listened to his melody and muttered, "Corny. Old-fashioned." And he remembered how it had been to be young, and outside the dorms, how it had been to be a professional musician, a nightclub entertainer.

He hadn't been a star, but he'd had a little success.

Then the style in music had changed, but Baboo didn't change with it. He had learned only one way of playing music, and he believed in that one way. To play some other way would have been all right for someone else, but for Baboo it would have been a kind of lying.

That was why he was here.

That was why he was unemployable.

Here in the dorms it was all right to be Baboo. Here in the dorms people liked old things, corny things, things that reminded them of the days when they'd been outside.

He began softly humming to himself as he played. A new melody was coming, and later, perhaps, there would be words.

IT WAS the morning of Baboo's last day.

"They're coming to arrest you," said Victor quietly.

Baboo, sitting on his cot with the poom-poom on his lap, looked up briefly and studied Victor's face to see if Victor was telling the truth. Baboo had an almost supernatural ability to detect insincerity, but he detected none in Victor.

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"Why?" asked Baboo without emotion.

"Your memories, Baboo. Everyone confides in you, even members of the underground. You know everyone's secrets, and now the police want to share that knowledge."

"Who put them onto me?" asked Baboo.

"According to our information, it was Chaplain Bill." Victor glanced nervously around. "You haven't got much time, Baboo."

"Time to do what? There's no place to escape to, is there?"

"No." Victor was unable to meet Baboo's eyes.

"Oh, I see. I see. No place except death. You want me to kill myself so that I won't reveal your own secrets and the secrets of your comrades."

"It's the only way." Victor's voice was barely audible. "They'll use electrohypnosis on you. There's nothing you can do to prevent them from pumping you dry of everything you know, and you know plenty. They could arrest hundreds of people with the information they can get from you."

Baboo thought, *Here it is already. The situation that murderer was talking about.*

The decision was not hard after all. It took him only a few heartbeats to think through all he had to do. "All right, Victor. I'll do it. Give me the keys to the air shaft."

"That's a good place, Baboo." Victor handed over the keys. "The fan blades at the bottom will . . . er . . . they may never figure out where you went."

"Thanks, Victor." Baboo was grinning at Victor's embarrassment. He stood up to his full height, looking down at Victor as if from a tower, then slung his poom-poom over his shoulder and marched out of the bunkroom, whistling.

It was the new song he was whistling. It was still unfinished.

Even with the poom-poom on his back, Baboo had no trouble climbing down the knotted rope in the airshaft to the two hundred and fourth floor. He was a little overweight from lack of exercise but still powerful as a champion weight-lifter.

He met Danny Berg, Greta's boy, in the hall and asked directions to Newton's bunk, then continued on his way.

Newton was quite startled to see Baboo. It is the student who goes to the teacher, not the teacher to the student!

"Well, hello Baboo. Sorry I haven't been around for a while to see you. You know . . ."

"Hello, Newton. I have something for you."

With a grunt Baboo slung the poom-poom off his back and laid it on Newton's bunk.

"But why. . . ?" began Newton.

"You should have it. It is you who best understand my songs." His voice was gruff and hurried, yet somehow gentle. Without

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another word he turned on his heel and strode away.

As Baboo entered the hall, a tiny feeble-minded dwarf girl everyone called "Piggy" scampered up to him. "You so big! So big!" she cried in awe. With a deep rumbling laugh he reached down and picked her up, along with her doll and toothbrush, in his great arms. She was so small he could carry her like a baby. "Oooh!" she gasped in wondering delight. "Piggy flying!"

"Do you like songs, little creature?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!"

"I'll teach you one," he said, and began, his deep voice reverberating in the hallway.

Join hands, there's a new world coming.
Join hands and form a ring.
Join hands there's a new world coming.
Join hands and dance and sing.

Piggy tried to join in, but couldn't carry the tune or even remember the simple words, so she just chanted, "Dance and sing, dance and sing, dance and sing."

With a bellow of laughter he set her down.

"Piggy go with you!" she cried. "Don't leave Piggy behind! Piggy love you! Let Piggy come along, big man!"

He patted her tangled hair. "You wouldn't want to come with me if you knew where I was going."

Piggy understood and began weeping and howling, but she did not follow her new-found friend as he went on his way. It was strange, but sometimes Piggy understood things better than anyone else.

There was something about the proud tilt of his head that made the Uns in the halls turn and look at him as he strode past, his yellow robe slapping at his legs, his black eyes glinting with a strange glittering light.

A security policeman saw him, recognized him, and shouted, "Hey, you there! Stop!" The Uns in the hall crowded together, blocking the policeman's path.

Without breaking his stride, Baboo swept into the outer office of Chaplain Bill and said to the receptionist, "Is Bill here?"

"Why yes," mumbled the startled woman. "But he's busy right now. He could see you a little later."

"I'll see him now," snapped Baboo, and then, to the horror of the receptionist, he took a running start and flung his full weight against the sliding panel leading into the inner office. The thin wood was smashed to splinters and Baboo lurched into the room, head lowered and arms swinging like an enraged gorilla.

Chaplain Bill was sitting behind his desk, mouth open and eyes bulging.

"Did you put the police on me?" demanded Baboo, towering

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over him.

"Why no . . . no . . . of course not," stammered the little fat man, but Baboo could not be lied to.

"I'll shoot!" cried the receptionist, standing in the shattered doorway with a deadly needle gun in her hand. "I swear I will!"

With unbelievable speed Baboo grabbed Bill in his arms and spun him around so that he formed a shield between Baboo and the receptionist.

"You let go of the chaplain!" she shrieked, but there was no conviction in her voice and her gun hand was shaking. For an instant the three of them stood there, motionless, then, smiling grimly, Baboo dashed out through the open picture window and dove over the railing of the little porch, Chaplain Bill still struggling in his arms. The receptionist ran toward the window before the echo of Bill's scream had died away. It was a long way down, so long that they were still falling when she reached the railing. To her, it seemed as if they were falling in slow motion, drifting to earth like two feathers intertwined, but of course that was not so.

It was late in the morning, almost noon. The sky was overcast and it looked like rain. The receptionist stood a long time at the railing, looking down and running her fingers again and again through her hair.

CAPTAIN CLARK and Normandy Taylor sat in Normandy's room after work, grimly watching the floor-to-ceiling 3D TV screen. The TV announcer was telling all about Chaplain Bill and Baboo. There were pictures, too; stills of them in life and movies of them in bloody mutilated death.

"The stupid fools," muttered Clark, sipping his drink and leaning forward to turn off the set. He sat back with a sigh and added, "I told them not to release that story to the press, but they wouldn't listen to me. They kept bleating at me about how the people have a right to know. Don't they realize that there are TV sets in the recreation rooms of the dorms, all over the world? Don't they realize how a story like this one can be twisted to inflame smoldering hatreds, to create a martyr and a holy cause?"

Normandy sat down on the arm of Clark's chair and let her hand rest lightly on his shoulder. "They don't understand out there, Cap. They don't want to understand. They've created a fictional character called 'The Happy Un' and made a sort of paradise out of the dorms in their imaginations, and now they've convinced themselves that their pretty fictions are true. Dream has replaced reality for a whole civilization. Even the Big Computer, their ultimate authority, shares their delusion, because it is they who program it and they who feed it information. Nobody

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outside the dorms has any idea of what it's really like in here. Sometimes even I, who live with them, who speak and interact with them every day, feel that I don't actually know what it's like to *be* an unemployable."

Captain Clark looked up at her, his face drawn and pale, and said, "Can a whole civilization be insane? Can all mankind share a schizophrenia?"

Normandy sighed and shrugged her shoulders. "Our society is not the first," she said softly, "and it won't be the last. Sometimes, when I read history books, it seems to me that every society that ever was has been founded on an agreed-upon delusion, but of course that's probably going too far. After all, how can you tell the difference between delusion and reality except by comparing notes with other people? Isn't that what reality is? What people say it is?"

"Perhaps," said Captain Clark thoughtfully. "for a little while at least, but then the real truth breaks in on the dream and those who cannot wake, die. Maybe that's what happens when a civilization falls."

Normandy laughed nervously. "God, Cap, but we're morbid tonight. Let's have another drink and then fold up the tents. I have a feeling we won't be getting much sleep in the next few days."

Clark was silent a long time. When at last he spoke there was something cold and distant in his voice. "I'll be sleeping in a cot in my office until this thing is over, Norm. I've written a letter to my wife. If anything happens to me, I want you to see she gets it." He handed it to her as he heaved himself tiredly to his feet.

"Okay, Cap," said Norm, a faint smile flickering across her lips. After Clark had gone, Normandy took a long hot bath, thankful for each moment of steamy peace.

NEWTON, lying on his bunk, knew that Victor had come up and was standing beside him, but he did not turn his head to look at him.

"It's come," Victor whispered.

Newton didn't answer.

"It's come," repeated Victor more loudly, shaking Newton by the shoulder.

"I know," said Newton indifferently.

"The little push we've been waiting for has come. We have our John Brown at last! Baboo! His death has captured the imaginations of the Uns as nothing else could. The Uns are with us now, all of them. They're screaming for revenge, for blood! They're rebelling already in some dorms, not even waiting for our signal."

"I know," said Newton again.

"Well, what's wrong then?" demanded Victor. "You're with us now, aren't you? You're the one Baboo gave his poom-poom to."

"Baboo was a phony," said Newton, sitting up wearily. "He preached non-violence and died with blood on his hands. He sang

(Cont. on page 43)

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The Story Behind the Cover

HALF PAST THE DRAGON

GRANT CARRINGTON

When I showed Joe Staton's cover painting to Associate Editor Carrington a small light bulb flashed into existence over his head and he proclaimed, "I want to write a story to go with that painting!" Herewith, the story.

LIE DOWN, my love, and I'll tell you a story.

Of course, it's a true story.

No, most true stories don't have happy endings. The true ending of most true stories is death.

Now be quiet, and I'll have a surprise for you when the story is over.

It takes place deep in deepest interstellar space, where gravity is only a whisper, where lithium ions taste like cotton candy. It is only here, far from planetary masses, that space dragons will be found, for the dragons are fragile creatures, wisps of hydrogen and helium, traces of argon and nitrogen. You could pass your hand through one and never feel anything but vacuum. Should a dragon approach a planet, it would be torn to shreds. A painful death. And perhaps a common one for space dragons, for they

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are curious beasts. Perhaps that's why there are so few of them.

I was the good ship *Kimono* in those days, plying the trade between Babe Ruth and El Nair. In those days, I tasted the stellar winds. Some of us saw them, some heard them, some felt them. Our brains, all that was left of what we were born with, encased in cryogenic cabinets deep in the bowels of our ships, interpreted the data in different and individualistic ways. Greedily I gulped the gravy-and-potatoes of hydrogen, the rare roast beef of helium, garnished with a sprig of ferric ion; I sipped the fine chablis of oxygen; and for desert I feasted on the baked alaska of nitrogen. Sometimes I could tell where an argon atom was born simply by the fragrance of its bouquet.

Oh, I had heard tales of space dragons, yes, and I thought of them as you do now—mere tales by space-drunk ships. I had never seen one, felt one, smelled one, tasted one, heard one.

They are different, Sam Hall told me. (It was this same Sam Hall who was going to write a book, *The Synaesthetics of Space.) We all see and experience dragons the same way. No matter how you experience anything else in space, you will see a dragon, smell the brimstone on his breath, feel the ghostly heat of his flame, and hear its roar.*

And what does roasted dragon taste like? I asked, trying to be sarcastic in my youthful ignorance.

Like rotten flesh, he answered.

How did we talk, without mouths? Without sweet mouths like yours, my dear? Yes, made for kissing and caressing. Why, we had radios, of course.

Sleep? Of course, we slept. Humans need sleep, whether they are just brain or if they have all their protoplasmic complement.

The computer was perfectly capable of taking care of all the routine chores: taking off, landing, and so on. In fact, I slept eighty percent of the time.

We were needed for those unforeseen instances. We were always awake at liftoff, orbital insertion, and landing, nominally in control, but in reality with our mental fingers over imaginary buttons. I only remember one time when I had to do something, and that has nothing to do with tonight's tale.

Okay. I'll tell you tomorrow night. Move over a little, will you? There, that's much better.

No, our emergencies always took place in empty interstellar space.

Yes, like space dragons. And wandering planets and renegade alien pirates. Ah, yes, those were exciting days, back before the galaxy was completely tamed. Of course, I didn't think so then. Many were the times I shit in my pants. That was embarassing. And dangerous.

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No, but my anal sphincter control was attached to the exhaust tubes. I lost a lot of fuel that way, fortunately never enough to keep me from taking it to a friendly planet. But it was close a couple of times, though.

Yes, I'll tell you about them some other night.

Of course, it was embarassing. Can you imagine what it's like to try to explain to a planetmaster why you're short on fuel?

Now quit asking questions, and let me tell you about the dragon. Yes, that does feel good.

It happened on one of my first trips as the *Kimono*. The *Kimono* was a lovely ship. I've worn many ships in my day, but putting on the *Kimono* was like slipping on a familiar old glove.

Ah, *Kimono*! My house, my home, my castle, my very being for so many years!

I'd heard about dragons, yes, but I thought they were just so much space gas, if you know what I mean. Space-yak and space-flak. Well, in a way I was right, of course. They *are* space gas, but not in the way I'd meant it.

There I was somewhere between the Horsehead Nebula and El Nair, half-asleep, as it were, in that eternal haze-land between sleep and wakefulness that you spend so much time in when you're in space, when there's nothing for you to do but sleep.

What? Oh, yes, there's other things to do. You can play volleyball, handball, football, baseball, basketball, hockey, chess, checkers, squash, ping-pong, or lacrosse; you can read any book you desire (as long as you've had the foresight to have it entered into the computer's memory banks), see any dramatic presentation you want, hear any recording you wish; you can make love to the galaxy's most beautiful woman, many of them long dead; you can write, compose, paint. . .

What's that?

My favorite was Rosemary Clooney.

Never mind; she was before your time. Or mine, for that matter.

You can write, compose, paint, make sculptures; or you can just wander by an unpolluted stream in a virgin forest. You can experience anything you've had the foresight to load into the computer. It's all in the mind, of course, but, then, what isn't?

No, I didn't mean to get solipsistic with you. Sorry.

Anyway, I was drifting along, a light show playing hazily in my mind to the faint ausurrus of space while the *Kimono* sped on its way to El Nair. Far from the continuous radio noise near inhabited planets, one could hear faint communications from long dead races, from long dead pilots of one's own race:. . .*I do have lights in sight on the ground. . .Is Professor Weisberg still at the Academy?. . .This program was*

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brought to you by Cheerios. . .The lights show up very well, and thank everybody for turning them on. . . .This is Sissy Face Control. . .In fact, some pilots look for brambles of static, hidden pockets where no manmade radiation can reach. I've never been a static addict myself, but I've felt the temptation of natural radiation, unpolluted by civilized and organized wavelengths. The only signal of any strength was that of the laser beacon from Babe Ruth to El Nair, fore and aft of the *Kimono*, but even that was so attenuated it could overwhelm the ancient murmurings of space.

The dragon. Yes, the dragon.

Well, I was just drifting along when this dragon appeared. Just like that. No warning. Just, zonk!, there it was.

I've talked to other pilots since then and they say that's the way it always happens. The dragons just pop out of nowhere. Some people think they come out of another dimension, some kind of hyperspace, and that there's really lots of them, but they rarely appear in our space.

It looked just as Sam Hall said it would: a thin, sinuous, bright green dragon with glowing red coals for eyes. The light of distant suns seemed to magnify a thousandfold as it reflected off the shifting atoms of its tenuous scales. It writhed in space like a cloud caught in the wind, but its writhing brought it closer to the *Kimono*, purposefully. The twin eyes winked on and off like evil variable stars.

It scared the shit out of me, I mean to tell you! Literally. Not much, because I'd managed to gain control of my sphincter since my last run-in with the Pleiades Pirates. But I wasn't quick enough and the dragon leaped for and swallowed that little morsel of exhaust emission, licked its chops, and waited for more.

You wouldn't think a dragon could look like a hopeful puppy, especially with glowing coals for eyes, but, so help me Fomalhaut, that's what that dragon did. And when it didn't get any more, it opened its mouth and a long tongue of hard radiation belched forth, smelling of sulfur. I laughed as the plasma field that protected the *Kimono* from gas clouds at relativistic speeds easily deflected the radiation. For a few microseconds, the umbilicus between Babe Ruth and El Nair was snapped, but it was quickly restored.

Now I was in a bit of a spot, but I wasn't too worried. In fact, the whole situation was kind of humorous: Here I was, deep in interstellar space, being trailed by a space dragon. Though trailed isn't quite the word: it had wrapped itself around the *Kimono* like a snake around a tree. It quite obviously had every intention of hanging around, looking for more handouts. I couldn't go near any gravitational

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masses or I'd be contributing to the demise of an endangered species, which was quite a serious crime at that time, but I had plenty of time to worry about that.

Not that I could have killed it, anyway. I had already come to like the little critter. I even gave it a name: St. George.

Never mind. It would be too much trouble to explain. But when you pilot spaceships for a while, you stuff your brain with a lot of useless knowledge. Sometimes you get mental indigestion and they have to use a brain pump on you. But it's all there, somewhere in your personal magnetic core.

No, not yours. Unless you put it there.

Well, I'll be damned! Yes, St. George and the Dragon! I don't know why it'd be in *your* core. But that's cute.

Every now and then, old St. George would belch a little more radiation on me, disrupting the laser thread for a few microseconds. Thinking about the problem, I slipped off into a restless slumber, hynpnotized by the flashing red light the computer kept sending me.

My cargo this trip was Babe Ruth's championship baseball team, on their way to El Nair for the District 3 semifinals of the Third Millenial World Series. They were the defending champions, of course. They had won 746 straight games, their last loss occurring when their center fielder (named Babe Ruth, of course) had stepped in a gopher hole.

The whole *team* was named Babe Ruth! This always caused problems whenever they made a substitution: "Babe Ruth pinchhitting for Babe Ruth." It was suspected that sometimes they took out one of their stars and resubmitted him as a pinchhitter later in the game. But how could you know?

No, they were in cryogenic cabinets too. Not as compact as mine, of course. But human beings rarely travelled awake in those days, when the space lanes were still wild. Just explorers and pilots like myself. Even between El Nair and Babe Ruth, there were several unsavory patches, not fit to be seen by an athlete who must stay simon pure and in condition. Besides, it took several years to make the trip. (That was back before the tachyon drive had been perfected, my dear.)

That lovely blinking red light the computer kept sending to me reminded me of those stalwart athletes I was transporting to El Nair. Why, you ask? Why, indeed? I asked myself the same question. I had no answer. I asked the computer.

Listen, dummy, it said to me, *we've run into an area of high radiation, higher than the plasma field can cope with. Do something about it!*

It was one of those emergencies

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that required the help of a human mind. A drifting, half-asleep human mind. The dragon! That's what it was. The dragon, belching radiation at the *Kimono*, was overwhelming my plasma shield and endangering my athletes. And furthermore, it was endangering *me!* Under that sporadic bombardment, I was drifting off again, unable to control my consciousness.

With that thought firmly in mind, I made a mental effort to pierce that haze and succeeded, long enough to realize that the computer was right. My internal radiation was rising, slowly but steadily, toward dangerous levels.

I was in trouble.

You see, the *Kimono* belonged to Odyssey Space Lines, Inc., and they had a contract with Babe Ruth that gave them exclusive transportation rights. And they capitalized on it in their advertising: "Travel on a Babe Ruth Liner!" "Make Your Home Run With the Team That Carries Babe Ruth!" "Strike Out for the Unknown on a Babe Ruth Exploratory Cruise!" And those were the least offensive ones!

If I didn't get the Babe Ruth baseball team to El Nair on time, they'd forfeit their Galactic Championship and their value to Odyssey Space Lines, Inc. would be zero.

And my value to Odyssey would be even less.

Of course, that was rapidly becoming the least of my worries.

Every time that St. George belched, radiation particles creeped or sped through the *Kimono*, depending on St. George's position. If he was at the head of the *Kimono*, our relative speeds approached 2*c* and those particles were gone faster than any computer could count. But if St. George was at my tail, why, that radiation would creep through so slowly that several particles could gather together in a cell long enough to throw a stage party with films of bomb barded nuclei and all.

I was, as they say, in trouble, and already drifting back to sleep.

Wake up, you crumb! the computer shot at me, meanwhile adjusting my adrenalin level.

I woke up.

At first I tried evasive maneuvers, but that only made things worse. With each maneuver, I'd use a little more fuel and St. George would gulp up the exhaust and come back, hungrily looking for more. Hell, they couldn't have been more than appetizers for him. He was waiting for the main course.

Get past St. George? Hell, I couldn't get half past the dragon!

It appeared the only thing to do was wait him out, coasting as far as possible, in the hope that St. George would get hungry and go look elsewhere before he'd belched us up to the danger point. I wracked my drifting mind for another solution, but it was getting harder and harder to

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concentrate. Old memories came drifting through my brain to say a brief hello then go floating on out.

I had to do something! I fought my way back through the haze, giving myself a beautiful migraine. The computer cheerfully informed me that the situation had changed: one of the suns along my course had chosen this time to go nova.

As the old saying goes, it never rains but it pours.

What? No, of course it never rains in space. What I meant was. . .oh, never mind.

I was headed straight for those expanding gas clouds, full of Cherenkhov radiation. What with my already weakened plasma shield, there was no thought of trying to plough on through. I would have to change course and skirt the nova. That was not a particularly difficult maneuver, even in my now somewhat punchdrunk state, but it would tie St. George still more closely to my metaphorical bootstraps.

Bemoaning my fate and wracking my brain for some way to lose St. George, I queried the computer for the requisite course change. That's when I had my moment of genius. Could we skirt through one of those ionized shells without exposing Babe Ruth to too much radiation? The computer assured me we could, giving me a skimming tangent that barely touched the outer shell.

When I fired the engines for the course change that was necessary, old St. George's eyes lit up like Betelgeuse itself as its brightest. Chomp! he went, chomp, chomp, gulping greedily behind me as I led him on.

At least he wasn't belching while he ate.

When we reached the outer shell of expanding gasses, St. George ignored the noval gasses and kept greedily gulping down my rich exhaust. As soon as I turned off the engines, however, to coast back out, he began munching all around him, wolfing down oxygen, helium, nitrogen, and ammonium ions in gay abandon.

I sometimes wonder what happened to old George. For all I know, he's still munching his way through that noval cloud. I hope he doesn't get heartburn.

Yes, that's all there is to it.

I'm sorry. You can't expect a climax with every story. I'll try to do better tomorrow night. But first, come over to the window, my love. Look up there. Yes, a little to your right and up a bit. Now, if my cesium clock is still accurate, in approximately 2.6 seconds you'll see. . .ah, there it is! Right on time. Yes, flaring up nicely.

The last time I saw that light, my love, was uncountable years ago, and now, here it is, shining down on us on the night of my tale. If we could magnify it impossibly many times, perhaps we'd see the shadows of a spaceship and a dragon against

(Cont. on page 50)

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Your Dreams *Can* with your own

Hundreds of men—previously working for salaries or wages—now enjoy greatly increased incomes, personal independence and secure futures as owners of their own businesses under the Duraclean Franchise

Unthinking men may tell you that the day is past when an individual can build a successful business of his own. The fact is that Franchising has opened a wonderful new world of opportunity for such men. The "mama and papa" grocery store, and the corner druggist have succumbed to the gigantic chains. But, in their place an exciting new kind of business abounds with big profit opportunities for the individual.

For twenty years the "service industry" has been growing with fantastic speed. Let the chains have the retail store business. Even a small business providing an unusual service can bring profits to the individual that were unheard of in the old days. And, unlike the chains, the service business today, is thriving under Franchising.

What is the difference? Just this: A chain is a large number of stores in a chain all operating under the same plan; under the same well-known name; *but* are owned by one corporation. In Franchising, the individual uses tested and proven plans for starting his business and building it; he operates under a Nationally Advertised and well-known name, he has step by step guidance *but he owns the business.* He enjoys the advantages of chain recognition, but he keeps all the net profits for himself.

The Duraclean Franchise is such a business. No store to rent. No fixtures to buy. No inventory or stock of goods to pay for. No office or work-room required. And, no special education or experience is needed for success. Men of almost every educational level have made glowing successes with the "know-how" furnished by our Company. They've worked from their homes as all Duraclean Service is given on the premises of the customer. In the beginning they've used the family car as all equipment can be carried in the trunk. Their only investment has been a

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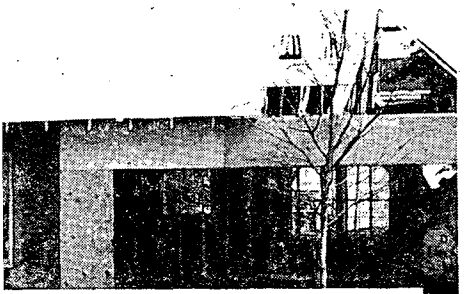
Become a Reality Duraclean Franchise



Dreams of others have come true

For the first time in 20 years, I've got security without fear of losing my factory job."
H.E., Ohio

Duraclean is one of the least expensive businesses to get started, but has a greater potential than any other." *R.H.R., Alaska*

have accomplished more with Duraclean in the past 5 years than in the 17 years I was working in the shop." *J.W., Pa.*

cash outlay of a little more than $1000.

What is Duraclean Service. It is a modern method of cleaning *and reviving color and resilience* of carpets, rugs, upholstered furniture and auto interiors—a method that has almost unbelievable superiority over the old way of harsh scrubbing with water, strong detergents, and power driven brushes. Tests made by an independent laboratory show that the Duraclean "Absorption Method" removes twice as much dirt and soil removed by machine scrubbing. And, the carpets and upholstery are dry and ready to use a few hours after cleaning. In addition to cleaning and reviving, you have six other equally superior services to increase profits. The improved Duraclean process has proved so superior that Duraclean Services are now available through a world wide organization.

Who are the customers? The finest homes in your community, yes. But, of equal importance hotels, motels, schools, shops, stores, offices, theaters, hospitals, and institutions. The commercial business is big and because much of this work can be done evenings or Saturdays, many men have started in spare time without giving up their jobs or pay checks. When they have seen from actual experience that Duraclean could pay them many times their former salaries, they have resigned the old job and become independent businessmen—with all the added respect and standing that a businessman has in his community.

If you've ever had a really strong desire to "some day own your own business" the Duraclean Franchise is well worth investigating. We have no salesmen to try to influence you. The entire Duraclean Opportunity is explained in detail in a 24-page book. This book will be mailed free to any man sincerely interested in a future of security and independence. Just your name and address is all that's needed. Send it today. After reading all the facts, if you decide to take the next step, you can write again and let us know.

We'll help you with financing, with training, with equipment, and with all our years of experience in showing other men how to make their dreams become realities. To investigate costs nothing and does not place you under the slightest obligation. Is this something you should do for yourself? Today?

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SAVING GRACE

TERRY CARR & LAWRENCE M. JANIFER

Terry Carr says of this story, "This is not a pact-with-the-devil story, no matter how it looks at first; it's a pact-with-God story. I started it a dozen years ago, got bogged down in the middle, let it sit for some years, discussed it with Larry Janifer, and he offered to finish it. You'll no doubt recognize my style in a lot of the lines, but this is Larry's rewrite. . ."

Illustrated by DAN STEFFAN

THE FIRST THING TO DO, Henry Mitchell told himself, the *very first* thing to do was to get everything clean. Absolutely clean. Spotless. He gritted his teeth, two of which were false, rolled up the sleeves of his monogrammed shirt, and got to work. Luckily, he had been influenced by a television commercial a few days before, and had ordered the maid to go out and buy a box of Tuff. There was plenty of cleaner.

This, however, was much too delicate a job to be entrusted to a maid, any maid. Henry finished mixing up the Tuff and began to scrub. Television had assured him that Tuff would do the job in a positive twinkling, whatever that was, with the invisible help of a muscular man who appeared to be about fifteen inches tall. What was more, when he was finished his hands would be as smooth and as white as Carrara marble, if a bit softer and warmer to the touch.

The promises of television, however, were inexact. Henry finished scrubbing, rinsing, drying and polishing in just under three hours, which seemed awfully long for a twinkling. His hands were red and wrinkled, and his back and legs were stiff from the unaccustomed exercise. Henry couldn't remember when he had scrubbed a floor last, and almost, before he caught himself, he made a vow never to scrub one again.

But the place was spotless, truly, wonderfully, completely spotless, and that was the important thing. That was all Henry cared about: as far as the magical properties of Tuff were concerned, he had no more faith in them, really, then he had in the way they spelled their name. To that extent, at least, Henry Mitchell considered himself a properly worldly cynic.

He considered restoring his strength with a few shots of bourbon, but at the last second he de-

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cided against it. It might (who knew, for certain?) be objectionable, and now was no time to take chances. Particularly, he reminded himself as an especially nasty twinge assaulted six or seven muscles he hadn't known he owned, after getting the place so nice and clean.

No risks. No. He found seven candles, placed them in what he had been assured were the proper places around the room, and lit them. Then, clocking himself with great care, he set fire to a small bundle of incense and watched it smoke away for exactly ten minutes. During the last of the burning time, he began to draw the pentacle on his clean and shining floor.

It had been eight years since Henry had had anything to do with drawing in any form. The figure, no matter how careful he was, kept turning out a little lopsided. But, he assured himself, the will would probably be taken for the deed: he had done his best: it was up to the spell now.

And the spell, he told himself with only a slight inner shrinking, came next. He drew himself cautiously, mindful of twinges, to his full five feet ten inches. He held his head high (minimizing his incipient double chin). He stood right in the center of the pentacle and began to recite.

Latin had never truly been his best subject. (In fact, thinking back, Henry wasn't sure that he had *had* a best subject.) But he

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felt a legitimate pride in his pronunciation: he had worked hard on every syllable. The words echoed in the big clean room, and seemed to hang oddly in the shadows thrown by the seven dripping candles. The spell went on for what seemed a long time, but Henry went manfully on to the end.

And then he raised his arms high, threw his head back, and (with a flare of the nostrils that was beautifully dramatic and entirely unconscious, based as it was on seventeen viewings of *The Sheik* during early childhood), he commanded:

"Appear unto me, O Spirit of the Afterworld!"

And that, he realized, was that.

A second passed, during which nothing whatever happened. Henry remained frozen in position, waiting. Maybe, after all, he had mispronounced some of the Latin. Or maybe the room wasn't clean enough. Or maybe . . .

He blinked. His arms came down and his head resumed its normal slump. Maybe his eyes were playing tricks on him—but there seemed to be a soft, supernal glow in the room that had nothing to do with Tuff or seven candles. And from somewhere even farther off than the next apartment the sounds of a choir touched his ears. Replacing the somewhat musty odor of his incense, the fragrance of frankincense and myrrh suffused the room.

It wasn't, he decided, his imagination. In which case . . . *in which case* . . .

His mind stopped working altogether.

There, standing before him, bathed in a golden light that made the candles crass and cold, was a silver-haired man of the most magnificent appearance. His brow, his visage, the whole carriage of his erect body and the stiff salute of the great white wings that sprang from somewhere near the back shoulder-blades, spoke of dignity, and order, of might and justice.

Henry gulped.

"I think you've made a mistake," said the angel.

"NO," HENRY SAID, somewhat surprised that his vocal cords remained under control. "No mistake, my Lord. Er . . . sir. Er . . ." As a replacement for the proper title, he made a low, sweeping and (except for an involuntary grunt) dignified bow.

"We are not titled," said the angel in a matter-of-fact voice. "Aquinas disposes of the point neatly . . . or is it Plotinus? I believe I ran across the argument just the other day . . . although of course we don't *have* days, not in any sense you might recognise . . ." The angel paused. "You say you have *not* made a mistake?" he inquired.

"That's right," Henry said, and tried a friendly smile. This had no

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visible result on the angel. "I know what the trappings might look like—I mean, conjuring up a demon and all that. But, after all, there don't seem to be any reliable references for—for anything else. I had to improvise a bit, as a matter of fact . . . but everything seems to have worked out all right." Speech, he found, had a calming effect on him. He was now, he noticed with relief, treating the angel just like one of the folks.

Almost, anyhow.

He smiled again and the angel said, with great suddenness:

"Averroes."

Henry gulped. "I b-beg your pardon?"

"The reference to titles of the angelic choir," the angel said. "Averroes: I recall it distinctly now. A very interesting demonstration: you might look it up some day."

Henry felt his head beginning to whirl. "Uh . . . sir . . ."

"Yes?" the angel said. "And I do wish you wouldn't use titles."

"But what shall I call you?" Henry asked.

The angel appeared to think deeply. At last he looked up. "You may call me Isidore."

Henry opened his mouth, shut it again and finally managed to say: "Is-Isidore?"

"In honor," the angel said severely, "of a very great Saint."

"Oh," Henry said. "Of course. Isidore." Somehow, he told himself, the interview was not going at all as he had expected.

Come to think of it, what *had he expected?*

He sighed and consigned the whole problem to the back of his mind, where he hoped it would have a pleasant time with his Id. The angel—Isidore—was saying: "If there has been no mistake, then I'll have to ask for an explanation, I'm afraid."

Henry nodded. "I have a proposition for you," he said, and then added quickly: "That is—a business proposition." He tried to smile beautifully, but he had the feeling that he looked like a man who had just felt the effect of strychnine. "I want to sell my soul to God."

There was a brief silence. Isidore said: "Now wait a minute—"

"Oh, I know," Henry said hurriedly. "Most people sell their souls to the Devil. I mean—most people who do sell their souls, they want to—well, you know what I mean. But I'm afraid that, in my case, it would be—well, superfluous."

Isidore raised his eyebrows and, very slightly, the tips of his wings. "Hmm," he said. "Are you truly so bad a man?"

"I wouldn't exactly say I was a *good* man, if you know what I mean," Henry said in a slightly embarrassed way. He waved a hand at the room, the expensive mahogany furniture, the full, rich drapes over wide picture windows, the completely equipped bar now discreetly swung back

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into the wall. "For one thing, my family is rich. I—"

"One moment," Isidore said sternly. "If you are going to discuss all that about the eye of the Needle, you ought to know that the Needle was, in fact, a rather low gate which provided entrance to the city of—"

"Oh, no," Henry said. "Pardon me. It's just that—well, since I was born, since my very first breath, I've been able to have every slightest whim fulfilled. Toys at first, of course. And food. And drink. And—well, I—"

"Of course," Isidore said curtly. "Wine, women and song."

Henry grinned spastically. "Actually," he said, "I've never had much of a singing voice."

Isidore nodded. "I see," he said. "And now you find that this life is an empty one. You want to avoid the boring recurrence of one occasion of fleshly pleasure after another—"

"*No!*" Henry said. Isidore stepped back, a trifle startled. Henry grinned again, feeling that no matter how he tried to ingratiate himself he went right on looking like an idiot. "That is," he went on, "I haven't found life empty yet. But I'm going to—I know that. All the signs are there."

"The signs?"

"Oh, it's in all the books," Henry said. "It's an old, old story. Rich young man driven to desperation by the complete ease of his life. Existence in this world, so meaningless when you don't have to fight for it. In all the books the rich invariably end up debauched, lost in alcohol or drugs, crawling in the gutter and getting their clothing all messy. Mud. Cigarette butts." He waved a hand, trying to sketch the horrible, stained life of the elderly rich.

"It has been known to happen," Isidore said cautiously. "In 1506, as I recall, there was just such a situation, which—"

"And that isn't all." Henry broke out. "My parents have just died—I don't suppose you've met them, in Heaven?"

Isidore shook his head. "I would hardly have done so in any case," he said. "My own inclinations have led me to the study of law and tradition—personal contacts with the souls of men is hardly my *forté*. Unless, of course, your parents were philosophical historians? Or specialists in legal theory?"

"Hardly," Henry said. "But when they died they left me everything. All the assets—and all the debts. My parents were not frugal people."

"And you are bankrupt?" Isidore asked.

"Worse," Henry said sadly. "I've just finished auditing the family holdings with my attorneys, and I find that I've got just enough to continue in the level of society to which my parents have accustomed me. Just enough to scrape by—if I want to dismiss half the servants, borrow money here and there, and finance loan

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with other loans. Put it this way: there's enough to keep me in liquor for the rest of my life—unless I want the very best." Henry paused. "And I do," he said. "Frankly, the prospect of grubbing for California wines is a horror. I'd rather have nothing at all, and be a beggar. In rags. Nice, clean, respectable rags."

"Well, then," Isidore said after a second, "you can simply give your inheritance away. There *is* precedent, you know."

"It's too complicated," Henry said. "You don't understand present-day law. Gift taxes, red tape—and, for that matter, convincing my attorneys in the first place. I'd never go through with it: I'd backslide. No, I've got to do it this way."

"Pardon me," Isidore said, in a tone that lowered the temperature of the room seven degrees. "I understand present-day law, as you call it, quite well. The complex structure of gift taxes, the inheritance taxes and the strictures on debenture holding which—but, of course, I'm sure your own lawyers can tell you about that, if not quite so thoroughly: a single human lifetime is hardly enough for full understanding of so beautiful a structure."

"Anyway," Henry said, "I don't want to do that. I want to sell my soul. To God. That ought to take care of everything."

Isidore sighed. "You don't understand," he said. "How can you sell your soul to the Person Who made it, and Who owns it? The Devil, begging your pardon, is a different matter—but selling one's soul to God is like giving oneself a deed of gift to one's own fingers."

"There must be some way," Henry said desperately.

"Well, well," Isidore said slowly, "let me hear your terms. It promises to be an interesting little problem, at any rate." He drew himself up, appearing even more solemn and dignified.

"I just want to be poor," Henry said, "poor and honest and Godly. I want some assurance that the vanity of the world will stop bothering me all the time."

"I see," Isidore said after a second. "And prayer and penance—"

"I'll backslide," Henry said instantly. "I'm weak. I've had money too long."

"Very well," Isidore said. "Let me think, if you please."

There was silence in the room, while the candles burned and Henry waited, for a long time.

AT LAST Isidore spoke. "Free will," he said, "is the noblest work of God. You would be better off depending on prayer."

Henry blinked. "What?" he asked.

"I will explain." Isidore took in a deep breath—or seemed to, at any rate. "If you make a valid contract with God, assuring you of leading a proper and virtuous life in poverty, you will lead such a life. Am I correct?"

"Well," Henry said, "sure."

"And if you do lead such a life,

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then Heaven will inevitably be your reward. Is that, too, correct?"

"That's what they say," Henry agreed.

"Very well, then," Isidore said. "Have you perceived that, in this way, you will be assured of salvation? And you may take it from me, sir, that no human being can be assured in advance of salvation. His free will continues to exist: he may at any time perform an act, or commit a sin, which if unrepented effectively bars him from the full rewards of the afterlife."

"But if God looks out for me—".

"God will not take away your free will," Isidore said. "That, sir, is a well-established point of Heavenly law. I need only refer to Aquinas, or to the more modern Newman, for human comment. Be certain that you cannot be assured of salvation."

Henry thought that over for a second. "Then—then I can't make a contract with God? It's not possible?"

"I merely advise you," Isidore said sternly, "that you would be better off trying to live a good life on your own. Pray for aid. Keep His Commandments. In this way—"

"It's too hard," Henry said. "I just want to make the contract, and be done with it."

"Please," Isidore said. "I beg of you—"

"Is it possible to make such a contract?" Henry asked.

"It is," Isidore said slowly. "But—"

"Then I want it," Henry said. "Let's get down to business."

Isidore waited a long second. Then, at last, he said: "Very well."

After another second Henry said: "Well?"

"First," Isidore said, "the conditions. You are now poor. Actually, you will be financially destroyed by tomorrow morning at ten o'clock *ante meridian*, Eastern Standard Time."

"Wonderful!" Henry said.

"Second," Isidore said, "society will reject you. You will be alone and friendless. You will have to work as hard as you can to continue your life. You will have no choice."

"Great!" Henry said. "It sounds like Heaven already."

Isidore shook his head sadly. "And, third," he said, "here is the contract, all drawn and signed. Your own signature is unnecessary: your word has been taken as binding. You understand that such a contract cannot be broken or abrogated?"

"Oh, sure," Henry said eagerly. Then he blinked.

In Isidore's hand, outstretched, was a pile of papers. There seemed to be thousands of sheets, all covered with closely printed words. In bulk, the sheaf resembled what Henry thought of as the original manuscript copy of the entire, uncut output of the Russian novelists, 1830-1962, plus

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a few of the longer works of Proust.

"That?" Henry said.

"The contract," Isidore said. "It is yours." He handed it over. Henry took it in both hands, and sagged under the weight.

"You certainly do things up brown," he said in an amazed voice.

Isidore nodded, this time with a trace of real pity. "You see," he said, "no human being may be assured of salvation. That is a fundamental concept of Heavenly law."

"But—the contract," Henry said. "You said—the conditions are all met, and everything—"

"Of course," Isidore said. "But the contract contains a loophole."

There was a silence. "Loophole?" Henry said. "What is it?"

The pity on Isidore's face grew. "You will have to find it," he said. "You see, your salvation must depend on you—and the contract cannot assure you of salvation. It must contain a loophole—and your salvation now depends on your finding it."

Henry stared at the sheaf of papers in his hand, the immense sheaf of papers.

"I *told* you you would be better off praying," Isidore said. "I'm afraid this isn't going to leave you much time to develop a singing voice."

—TERRY CARR
& LAURENCE M. JANIFER

A Song Of The Rising Wind (Cont. from page 26)

about universal love and died in an act of hate."

"So what?" Victor was exasperated. "All saviours are phonies. Buddha, Moses and Jesus were no better. Jesus preached nonviolence too, but he resorted to violence to drive the money changers from the temple. He preached faith, but on the cross he cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?' Sure, saviours are phonies, one and all, but they are useful phonies, useful as myths to the professional revolutionaries that come after, useful as propaganda symbols to sway the masses, to unite the oppressed against their oppressors!"

Newton did not answer, only picked out, slowly and painfully, the tune of "I am You" on Baboo's poom-poom. Before Victor could formulate another argument, a group of grim-faced Uns came up behind him and called to him.

"The signal has come, Victor," said the leader of the group. "All communications are jammed. All the heavy weapons in this sector are sabotaged. Let's go."

They gave Victor a laser rifle and a few hand missiles and they all went off together talking excitedly in low voices, leaving Newton brooding sullenly in his bunk.

—F. FARADAY NELSON

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"Ova Hamlet" made her first appearance in these pages–and, indeed, in any pages–in October, 1969 ("Man Swings SF"), and her most recent with "Agony and Remorse on Rhesus IX" (August, 1972). Now Richard Lupoff passes on her seventh story, the product of his collision with a night table and the ensuing "images of Malzbergian enlightenment" which filled his head–

GREBZLAM'S GAME

OVA HAMLET

Illustrated by JOE STATON

FURIOUSLY I REACH for Opponent's lob, bringing my paddle down in a vicious, sideswiping arc. The paddle's gnurled composition surface smashes into the careening white globe as it reaches the zenith of its flight and sends it screaming back to Opponent's side of the table.

This will be my triumph, this will be my moment of joy and vindication. The game may end as it will, win or lose, lose or win, etc., but this moment they cannot take away from me. My heart leaps. I can see Opponent reacting to the smash: he reaches for it, stretching his arm, trying for one of his infuriating saves, but he has not calculated for the English that I put on the ball and its rapid bounce vectors horizontally as well and Opponent misses it completely, sprawls across the table with a crash.

The spectators applaud.

"Brilliant shot, Grebzlam!" someone shouts.

And "Hurray for Grebzlam!"

It is a female voice cheering for me, I can tell, I can recognize the cloying, whining tone of a female.

I grimace pleasantly.

My shot misses the table completely, slithers among the crowd watching the contest between Opponent and myself.

Stunned, I shrink within myself. I seethe, waiting for some response from Officials to this disaster. I wonder if I will be expected to debase myself further, to creep and slide between the feet of spectators searching for the lost ball.

Linesman shouts "Off!"

I hate Linesman, his jolly enthusiasm for the game, the glee with which he announces my every *faux pas*, the way he wallows in my every humiliation.

Someone in the audience titters. A female, of course. Altogether the spectators are reacting to this incident with more restraint than I would have ex-

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pected of them. They can hardly be considered sensitive or decent people, certainly not here on Ship, no.

In fact they are disgusting, gross. But I must concede, not quite as disgusting and gross as one might have been led to anticipate.

"Sixteen to three," Scorekeeper announces. He smothers a cough politely.

I hate Scorekeeper even more than Linesman. At least Linesman makes no attempt to conceal the malice and contempt with which he regards me but Scorekeeper maintains his polite detachment, his Official's air of objectivity, at all times. But I know that he despises me, and in return I hate him as much for his hypocrisy as for the ill-will he conceals.

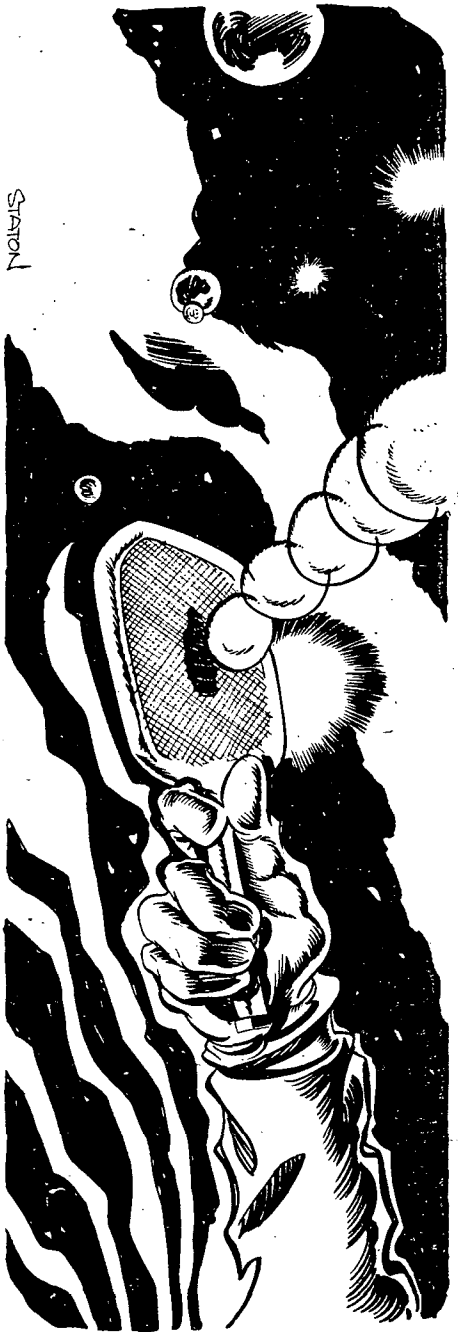
Linesman reaches into a baggy warmup jacket with Ship's insignia on the back and pulls a fresh ball from a pocket. He tosses a casual glance at the scoreboard where my shame is posted, 16/3. He rubs the fresh ball between the palms of his hot, fleshy hands and throws it to Opponent.

Opponent catches it with his free hand, gracefully, putting me to further shame for my own clumsiness. He holds the ball up, looks at me questioning with his eyes as if to say, Ready?

I nod.

He serves the ball.

But I am not ready. I don't know why I nodded. I was standing off balance, my weight not



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evenly distributed on my feet. Opponent has tried one of his deadly corner serves, catching me completely off balance.

If I try to recover and return the serve I will probably stumble and take a pratfall, miss the shot anyway, lose the point and reduce myself to a laughing stock for the spectators. But I try anyway, and twist an ankle painfully, falling to the floor and rolling into the front row of spectators who kick at me viciously with the their sharply pointed Ship's issue boots.

A groan goes up from the spectators and as I struggle to regain my feet, convinced that the point is lost, I hear Linesman announce happily "Mr. Grebzlam's point."

Opponent has finessed himself, missed his serve, put the ball squarely into the net.

Scorekeeper announces coolly "Sixteen to four. Mr. Grebzlam serves."

Twelve points deficit. This is not insurmountable. I am far behind Opponent but now I have the serve. If I can score five quick service aces the game will stand at sixteen to nine. Scorekeeper will have to admire my fortitude, my ability to absorb punishment, withstand pain without visible complaint.

Audience, too, will begin to appreciate me.

Audience has never appreciated me but they remain. They must care somehow or they would leave, but there is always a packed gallery at Game.

There must be passengers elsewhere on Ship—passengers and Officials. Sometimes during lengthy volleys, while audience is silent and the only immediate sound is the rhythmic *ponk-CLONK, ponk-CLONK* of Game, sounds come from elsewhere on Ship, sounds which I can hear with my abnormally sharp sense of hearing.

Somewhere on Ship a band is playing, I think, and passengers are dancing to its music. Males and females grapple and grope for each other, their bodies hot and steaming, odors rising from their private parts as they make polite small-talk.

Somewhere on Ship there is a swimming pool, males and females wear their most revealing, shameless bathing garb as they splash and cavort in the pursuit of each other.

I have the ball now, held lightly between two fingers of my left hand, the aluminum handle of my paddle gripped tightly in my sweating right palm. I look at Scorekeeper. He returns a neutral, objective look of assessment. I look at Linesman. He glares at me, an angry, wolfish grin pulling back his lips, sending bolts of terror through my body.

Opponent is trying to stare me down. I raise the ball and prepare to serve. If I can score a quick service ace now the pattern will be set. I will run up a series of points and come from behind. Opponent's confidence will be

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shattered, his pacing destroyed, he will be reduced to a grovelling hulk before my furious onslaught.

I make a misleading gesture, twitching my right shoulder to lead Opponent's eyes in that direction while with a quick upward twitch of my left wrist I bring the ball into play, strike at it with an upward flick of my paddle. *Pick-CLONK*, the ball goes, making the distinctive sound of a serve.

The extra spin on the ball will make it accelerate as it touches the table obliquely, once on my side of the net, once on Opponent's. It is a trick I learned years ago and have worked painfully to perfect, muscles crying out for surcease and perspiration dripping into my eyes.

The ball flies forward, a gleaming white pellet of purity, there is a tiny *tsk* sound and it continues across the net, arcing higher than I had planned, descending, *ponk* on the far side of the Table and bouncing once more. Opponent moves his empty hand and catches the ball in mid-air.

Linesman says "Let ball," almost giggling as he sprays the maddening words.

Opponent, grinning wolfishly—nearly the same grin that Linesman uses to pierce me—tosses the ball to me.

It bounces once, *pschk*, and I catch it in one hand. Time seems to halt for a moment. I look at audience, at Officials, at Opponent. I look at the table and think of Game.

The reason I'm doing so badly, I realize, is that the table, bolted to the floor to keep it from slipping, is mounted parallel to the long axis of Ship. Ship's acceleration thus effects every shot, helping Opponent, making his serves a little hotter, his marginal drops a little longer, getting them across the net into my court to steal points that are rightfully mine. And every shot of mine is effected also: my hot serves are shortened, slowed, my lobs fall short, into the net.

If things were reversed—simple justice cries out for the reversal of our positions—if things were reversed Linesman and Opponent would have those wolfish grins wiped from their leering faces, Scorekeeper's cool objective statements would have a different ring to them.

Scorekeeper announces levelly, "Mr. Grebzlam's serve, single let ball."

I shake myself.

Time flows again.

I hold the ball between my fingers and serve again. No extra fillip of technique this time, no English, no deliberate distracting gestures. If I fail on this serve there will be no string of points for me, Opponent's momentum will continue, the Game will be lost.

Simply I serve the ball, *pick-CLONK*.

Opponent returns the serve easily, *ponk-CLONK*.

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It is an easy return but it comes with neither steam nor twist. I return it easily, *ponk-CLONK*.

Again Opponent's return, a soft shot, near the center line, I hear a low murmur from audience behind the ball's sound, *ponk-CLONK*.

As I swing my paddle I catch a glimpse of Opponent's expression, a relaxed, aggressive confidence. Is Opponent playing a game of cat-and-mouse with me? Is this a trap to make me relax? Is he simply waiting me out, playing a simple game of return in anticipation of my driving the ball into the net or off the table?

I attempt a corner placement.

The ball whizzes through the still air of the game room. Beneath my feet I can feel the rumble of Ship's mighty engines. There is a barely audible *tick* as the ball drops off the end of the table.

Opponent, knees flexed, elbows out, paddle held before him to return my shot, looks poleaxed. Paralyzed.

Linesman grins, opens his mouth to speak.

Did he hear the *tick* as the ball barely tipped the edge of the table, or is he in league with Opponent, prepared to falsify his call of the point in order to add to my humiliation and disgrace?

Gleefully he cries "Mr. Grebzlam's point!"

I am vindicated. Overwhelmed.

Opponent seems to stagger, the loss of the point like a physical blow to him.

I giggle triumphantly.

Scorekeeper coolly announces *five to sixteen*.

The ball has careened off into audience again but Official reaches into his pocket and feels around, pulls out a new ball and rolls it to me. I fumble slightly, then pick it up.

I laugh aloud, throw back my shoulders and without waiting for Opponent to recover put a service ace past him.

Linesman opens mouth to complain that I served before Opponent was ready but Opponent gestures magnanimously.

Scorekeeper announces *six to sixteen*.

Tonight after Game I will go to Ship's bar, find some female spectator who witnessed my triumph. There is no question any longer, I will have my choice of any of them.

There will be no need for subtlety but I will exhibit style nonetheless. We will have a drink of whiskey, listen to some music, then go to her cabin. I will tear her clothes off and throw her down. This time it will be better. So far it has never been any good, they always complain afterwards.

"Gremzlab, Grebzlam," they say, "can't you do better than that? All this buildup for that? Get out, Grebzlam!"

How many nights have I slunk back to quarters from the cabin of some disgruntled female. The next day they are never part of

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audience, not willing to see me even in defeat at Game, they would rather avoid me altogether. But sometimes we meet again, even by accident. Sometimes when I go to the bar looking for females we meet, and they try to pretend they don't know me.

But I insist. I talk to them. I ask them questions.

What was wrong? What do you want? Just what exactly to you really truly want? What is it that you want?

"Grebzlam," they say to me, "just go away. That's what we want, that's what we truly actually want of you, just leave us alone, Grebzlam!"

They take their purses, finish their drinks and disappear from the bar, leaving me alone with Bartender and Steward and whatever other Official happens to be present. I shuffle from the room and go to quarters.

Opponent rouses me from this fugue by clearing his throat.

I exchange a quick, angry glare with Linesman and put my serve directly into the net.

The ball rolls back toward me, speeded by the Ship's own acceleration. I snatch at the ball and it skitters between my fingers. I fumble and grab it and serve again, the aluminum handle of my paddle slipping from my sweaty hand as I serve.

The ball bounces once on the table, *pank*, and bounces off sideways without ever reaching the net while my paddle clatters across the table in the opposite direction and falls to the floor. I stoop to retrive it and hit my head on the edge of the table. There is an excruciating pain and I see stars.

I hear Opponent's voice, "Grebzlam, are you all right?"

Of course I'm all right! I retrieve my paddle and look at the score indicator. I am trailing Opponent by a count of 6/18.

My last serve is a good one but Opponent returns it and we have another long volley. Finally Ship lurches and throws me off balance and Opponent receives the point. I protest to Linesman that the point should be played over but he denies that the Ship moved at all.

"Ship's acceleration is steady," he insists, "and Game is completely stable." As usual he is grinning angrily at me.

"Opponent serves," Scorekeeper announces neutrally.

He takes the ball and serves easily to me. I return the serve, *ponk-CLONK*, Opponent returns my shot, *ponk-CLONK*. He is playing a placement Game, putting one shot to this corner, one to that. I return each placement, but with increasing difficulty. I lack enough time to recover fully from each placement. I leap back and forth at my end of the table, more and more frantically, sweat springing in great beads from my brow.

I make a return from the left, *ponk-CLONK*.

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My shot is easy, down the middle.

Opponent's next placement is to my right. I leap sideways, make the return, *ponk-CLONK*, land on my feet, reverse my momentum—this is difficult, this is agonizing, but it is something I do anyway—I move to my left in preparation for Opponent's next placement but he makes his shot *ponk-CLONK* to the right again and I stand helplessly watching his soft shot bounce off the table and roll into the crowd of spectators behind me.

Official says "Opponent's point."

Scorekeeper says "Game point, Opponent."

I stand panting, overwhelmed by despair. I decide on a final, dramatic move. I will neither give Opponent the satisfaction of beating down my final defense nor back him into victory by netting my next shot. I will bear my breast for the knife, robbing Opponent thereby of the pleasure of victory.

Opponent serves.

I deliberately stand deep, receive his service and strike upward with my padddle. I will lob the ball high and deep. I will give him an easy bounce. I will let him slam the ball onto my side, *BOINK!*, sailing it high over my head on the rebound, past me and into audience, ending this travesty once and for all.

Opponent's service arrives, *CLONK*, I respond, I make my lob, *p-konk*, high into the air. The ball sails high over the table, past Linesman, over Opponent's astonished paddle and lands on his trousers and slithers to the floor.

"Opponent's point," Linesman says.

"Opponent's Game," Scorekeeper announces.

We reverse ends of the table and prepare for the next Game.

—OVA HAMLET

Editorial (Cont. from page 5)

Each hopes to give every story the same careful consideration he would like given his own stories.

What will happen if you submit a story *after* October first, without including 25¢? You will receive it back with a polite note stating that your manuscript was not read and requesting the 25¢ fee upon resubmission.

FINALLY, manuscripts should be submitted to our Falls Church office—Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046—for prompt consideration, and I hope the majority of those among you who have stories to submit will appreciate the necessity of our decision.

—TED WHITE

Half Past the Dragon (Cont. from page 33)

those rapidly expanding gas clouds.

The name of the star? I believe it's called Eta Draconis.

Shall we go back to bed? Unplug me before you turn off the lights, will you, dear? Thank you. —GRANT CARRINGTON

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WHAT'S A MOTHER FOR?

DAVID HOROWITZ

Not all women favor Women's Lib–they have too much to lose. . .

"IT'S AWFUL, MOM. Our whole marriage has gone down the drain. And it's all because of that goddam women's lib stuff. She's all wrapped up in herself and there's no room for anybody. Not me. Not the kids. So Mom, you've got to help me. Just a few words from you and. . . .

"I knew something was wrong," my mother said. "You don't call. You don't ask me to the house."

"You don't understand, Mom. How can I ask you to come to a house where there's no love? I could kill her. You know what she told me? Our marriage is a lie. For 12 years she's been living in a cacoon and now she wants to get out."

"A little happiness is all I ever wanted," my mother said.

"Look, Mom. I'm desperate. Do you think I'd come to you if I wasn't? But I can't reason with her. Every night she goes someplace else. The political club. The PTA. You want a murderer for a son? Don't talk to her."

"It's my fault. I did too much for you, Marvin. I was too good. Whenever you were in trouble, I was there. That's why you're not strong enough to handle your marriage problems. Your father was right. 'One day, Mildred,' he said. 'You'll pay.' Now, I'm paying."

"You can't blame yourself for what's happened, Mom," I said. "Or me, either. All I know is the marriage is hopeless. Rhoda's made up her mind to end it."

"Oh, my God! Not a divorce, Marvin."

"Do you think I want it, Mom? But I can't talk to her. She says I'm not exciting. All I want to do is come home and be with my family. Is that bad, Mom? I'm ashamed to admit it, but we don't even sleep together anymore."

"Oh, my God!"

"What hurts most are the kids. They don't know what's going on, but every time I hear them laugh it cuts through me like a knife. I cry a lot, Mom. I lay awake wondering what it's like to be a weekend father. Not being able to watch them grow up. And she'll get them. The mother always gets the kids. She says she wants them and I don't know why. I'm the only one who ever does anything with them."

"I never liked her, Marvin."

"I know, Mom."

"I should have said something a long time ago."

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"I know, Mom."

"But I thought, no. I won't interfere. And now look what's happened."

"In a way, it's almost worse for you, Mom. She resents you. She resents our relationship. When I asked her for the kids she laughed at me. 'So you can bring them home to momma?' she said. 'So she can fawn over them like she did her little Marvin? Not on your life!' "

"She said that?" my mother said, and her face turned crimson.

"She said that, Mom."

"All right, Marvin. You go home and put that girl on the phone with me. I'm not saying I don't believe you, but I want to be sure. I want to hear all this from her own mouth."

I kissed her goodbye, and when I got in the car I had to sit a few minutes because my heart was pounding. All the way home I was in a frenzy of anticipation. And when I pulled into the driveway, I was suddenly conscious that my shirt was wringing wet.

Rhoda and the kids were in the garden, clawing out weeds around the tomato plants. I motioned her toward the house.

"Before you say anything," she said, "I want you to know that I'm going out tonight."

"But it's Saturday."

"Well, there's an emergency ecology meeting and I think I ought to be there. Besides, it's about time we stopped pretending that we still have a marriage."

"Okay," I said. "But before you go I'd like you to talk to my mother."

"So you've told her."

"I felt I had to. Sooner or later she would have suspected."

"I'm glad, really, It's in the open now." And then she said, not unkindly, "Oh, Marvin, what can she say? It's too late for words. You're not a little boy, anymore. She can't help you this time. She can't help us."

"Please," I said. "Just talk to her."

I dialed my mother's number and handed Rhoda the phone. It started off like I thought it would. Quietly. Compassionately. But I knew the rancor would have to come, and I could see it beginning in Rhoda's face. And then finally it came, the anger and indignation rising to a boil in her eyes and screaming with bitter finality. "I don't want him or you," she shrieked. "I want out!"

I watched her storm out of the house and then I picked up the phone.

"Mom?"

"I never liked that girl, Marvin."

"I know, Mom."

"I don't like the words I'm thinking, Marvin."

"I know, Mom."

"What can I say?"

"Whatever you want to, Mom. You know what's best."

"Where is she now?"

"In the garden."

"All right, call me later. And

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Marvin? Bring the children over to dinner tonight."

How long did I sit there? Waiting. Waiting. And then I heard the scuffle of feet on the back steps and before the door blew open I knew it was all over.

"Pop, Pop," Joey yelled. "Come here, quick."

I ran outside and there were Joey and Melissa kneeling beside the tomato plants.

"It's a frog," Joey said. "Can we keep it?"

"Where's mommy?" I said. But the words caught in my throat.

"I don't know. I thought she was here with us. Pop? Can we keep it?"

"No," I said. "We'll take a ride way out in the country and you and Melissa can put it in the woods where it belongs."

"Aw, pop."

"I'm sorry, Joey. Now you and your sister get dressed because we're going to grandma's for dinner."

"But the frog will run away."

"It won't run away," I said.

We went back into the house and when they were upstairs I called my mother.

"Mom? We'll see you in a little while. And, Mom—thanks."

"Don't be silly, Marvin," she said. "What's a mother for?"

—DAVID HOROWITZ

ON SALE NOW IN OCTOBER AMAZING

THE SUN'S TEARS by **BRIAN M. STABLEFORD, STELLA BLUE** by **GRANT CARRINGTON, DOWNFALL** by **JEFF JONES,** the conclusion of **JACK VANCE'S** great new novel – **THE DOMAINS OF KORYPHON, SPACE THROUGH OUR FINGERS** by **JACK C. HALDEMAN II, LIKE THE SUN IN SPLENDOR** by **SANDRA MIESEL,** and many new features.

ON SALE IN JANUARY FANTASTIC (Nov. 26th)

A BRAND NEW CONAN NOVELET – SHADOW IN THE SKULL by **L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP & LIN CARTER.**

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THE ALL NEW AND COMPLETE ISSUE featuring **CHARLES L. HARNESS** short novel – **THE ARAQNID WINDOW, ROBERT F. YOUNG – THE DECAYED LEG BONE, GEORGE R. R. MARTIN – RUN TO STARLIGHT** and many new outstanding stories and features.

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WILL-O-THE-WISP

THOMAS BURNETT SWANN

(conclusion)

The Gubbings were suspected of witchery by the good people of Dean Church, but the Gubbings knew themselves to be the descendants of fallen angels. And Stella was an angel indeed, winged scarlet like her hair and dangerously captivating to Robert Herrick, poet, vicar, and pagan that he was. . .

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

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SYNOPSIS

IN POST-ELIZABETHAN England ROBERT HERRICK—ROBIN to his friends—has come to Dean Church in grim Devon to be vicar. And closest among the friends 39-year-old Herrick finds is NICHOLAS STANDISH, yet a boy and although in his teens only five feet tall.

Nicholas was attending the Emmanuel College at Cambridge University as a proper Puritan, but un-Puritan thoughts had a way of insinuating themselves in his dreams, if not his waking reveries. He prevaled upon his roommate, GEORGE, to take him roistering, and made a sad botch of it—becoming inebriated, too frightened of her to allow a barmaid to make the usual advances, he stumbed into the street and fell under the hooves of a passing horse. His leg was broken and he went home in disgrace to Dean Church and his dour father, MICHAEL STANDISH.

The elder Standish had already written his son an ominous letter in which he said, "Our new Vicar, Robert Herrick, to say nothing of staring shamelessly at the ankles of the comeliest maidens in his congregation, to say nothing of having included a poem by Catullus in his last sermon *before* the Twenty-Sixth Psalm, is perhaps, nay, probably, guilty of a crime for which the only suitable punishment is burning at the stake. *He is said on good authority to consort with the infamous Gubbings of Dartmoor.*" Now that his son is returned, he sends him to Herrick to spy upon him that these charges may be probed.

It is with a guilty conscience that Nicholas returns to his friends, and all too soon Robin's open, honest friendship wins from him a confession of his supposed mission. It matters not.

During the festival of Harvest Home, SCOBBLE, a loutish young fellow with as many warts as freckles, produces a bear on a chain which he proposes to bait and torture for sport. A child, ASTER, appears and begs Robin to free her bear. He does so, and is rewarded with thanks from both the child and her mother, who introduces herself as STELLA, and says that she and her daughter live in Dartmoor.

She might have said "In Hell;" such is the effect of her words. "But nobody lives there except the Gubbings," someone cries.

"I live there," Stella says, matter of factly. After sharing a tankard of ale with Robin and Nicholas she collects bear and child and leaves.

The Gubbings are rumored to be inhuman, or at least unhuman, but no details are known about them save that they appear at night on the moors with a dancing, bobbing light, a will-o-the-wisp, attempting to lure the folk from their homes and into traps.

A light appears in the night and Robin and Nicholas decide to follow it. It is Robin's belief that Stella is sending for him, but he is sadly mistaken. Although it appears the light is borne by a child like Aster, it is not she, and when a woman's voice greets them she identifies herself as Stella, but is not. They are captured by the Gubbings, and she who was not Stella asks, "Is it true what they say about you, Robert Herrick? That you found a village of virgins and left it a village of whores?"

The spokeswoman for their captors is JUDITH, and she appears to be roughly equivalent to an Old Testament Judge like Deborah. Nicholas and Robin are taken through a village of rude sod huts to a church built of timbers in the shape of an enormous crucifix. It seems a place in which to celebrate death.

The Gubbings, it seems, are simply—or not so simply—Puritans. Indeed, their Puritanism is extreme,

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and their accusations against Herrick are suspiciously like those made against him by such as Nicholas' father—he seems to love life too much. The specific charges are insobriety, lust and fornication, and the Gubbing congregation seems both well-informed on doings in Dean Church (and indeed Dean Parish) and unwilling to believe the truth about Herrick or his protestations of innocence.

Book Two: Stella

HER ANCESTORS had flown with the eagles, but her contemporaries lived in cottages built of sod. She had married a human sailor, PHILIP, been widowed, and now lived once more in Dartmoor among her people, the Gubbings, with her small daughter and an aging bear in a windmill which no longer ground grain.

Stella carried in her veins the blood of royalty; from her shoulders dimunutive wings sprang like thwarted flames. According to the Book of Redemption, a collection of ancient legends vampirized of their joy and infiltrated by the harsher commandments of the Old Testament, her people were fallen angels, condemned forever, at least in the temporal world, to suffer and climb and atone. She knew that her people had indeed fallen from the sky, but as victims of a plague called Feather Blight. Today they were known as Gubbings, but once they had been the Skykings or woodpecker folk who had dwelled in Italy and England and built their homes in the branches of kingly oaks. Such facts were recorded in the book of Rejoicing, a forbidden volume which she kept in her chest and guarded as if it were a newly hatched egg.

She loved her husband well, and grieved his death. Now she is lonely, a fact her daughter knows full well; and having once spied Robin bathing in a stream by moonlight, she has fallen unwillingly in love with him.

As a member of Judith's congregation, she suggests the matter of Robin's guilt or innocence be tested by a Trial by Rhyme. Herrick is a master poet and it is upon this that she places her trust. It is not misplaced: he wins.

But the Gubbings will not allow him to return to Dean Church and the outer world, ignorant though he remains of their true nature. They insist that he remain a prisoner. Stella points out that Robin was deceived in her name and asks that he and Nicholas be placed in the custody of those whose names were used to lead them here, and become her prisoners. She points out that they may be able to repair the mill and restore it to its function.

Reluctantly, Judith agrees with her logic and commends them into her care, but when she turns her back Stella feels Judith's stare like a scorpion, and knows that Judith has added to her grievances against her. . .

Chapter VII

"I COULD EAT A BEAR" said Robin, apparently forgetting that Artor was in the room. "It was only a metaphor," he hurried to add, but not before Artor had given him a melancholy look and retired to his bed beside the cradle. "What I meant to say was, I'm ravenous. Nicholas and I haven't eaten since supper last night."

"Then we had water-cress," Nicholas mumbled.

"I can do better than that," said

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Stella, her suspicion confirmed that Robin did not eat as he should, and with Aster's help she planned such a meal as she had once served to Philip on his return from a voyage. A less modest woman would have called it a feast.

The brick oven at the side of the fireplace was already laid with a fire. With the help of a flint box, she lit the faggots and swept their ashes into a copper bucket, and placed a loaf of current bread and a pork pie on the hot hearth and covered them with the ashes. She knew that the bread was ready to eat when she could tap its bottom and hear a faint rumble; and the pie, when its crust was brown. The wainscot table-chair soon tinkled with pewter posnets and thumped with wooden dishes, and the air was wreathed with a redolence of saffron cakes which, though lost upon Stella, excited her guests to anticipatory sniffings and a remark from Nicholas that he hadn't smelled such a fragrance even in the Devil Tavern of Cambridge.

Happiness entered the room like the spirit of Mother Goose; invisible but tangible; protective and proprietary. "We're birds of a feather," thought Stella, echoing an old adage originated by her own people, though later claimed by the English peasants. Aster began the meal by asking Robin to ask a blessing.

"Something special. A poem just for the occasion."

"But poets need time," protested Stella.

"Mama, he beat Judith in the Trail by Rhyme, didn't he?"

Robin looked doubtful, then confident. "Something special. What about a blessing for *you* to ask, not me? I'll teach it to you, though." They joined hands around the table:

Here a little child I stand,
Heaving up my either hand;
Cold as paddocks though they be,
Here I lift them up to thee,
For a benizon to fall
On our meat, and on us all. Amen.

"I'm nine," she reminded him, "though of course I'm little in size. Yes, I think that's worthy of Mother Goose. She's one of our saints, you know. The patron of poets. I especially like the paddocks. I had one when I was young." In Devonshire, "paddock" was another name for "frog."

And so the meal proceeded from dish to delight to dish. . . . Peas and sparrow grass to keep a big man from running to fat. West Country Tarts to plumpen a peeked boy. Firelight; candles; conversation. " 'Tis not the food but the content that makes the table's merriment. . . ."

Finishing the last cake, Aster said with a meaningful look at Robin:

"Mama used to serve such meals to my father in Exeter. Her *husband*. You don't eat so well in

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your vicarage, I expect."

Robin for once was caught at a loss for words, but Nicholas hurried to agree with Aster. (Tomorrow, Stella thought, I will see to healing his leg.)

"Every man needs a cook, and these days it's moré economical to marry one than to hire one. That way, they're always at hand. They can cook and sweep and clean and what-have you whenever you like."

"Yes," muttered Robin to Nicholas when Stella busied herself with removing the dishes—he seemed to forget the acuteness of her hearing—"and they always expect conversation. A man can't get any work done. Sermons, now and then; poetry, never, except to *them*." He spoke not unkindly but with conviction. Then, when Stella returned to the wainscot table chair and raised the table portion into the back of a chair and settled Robin among its constellation of cushions and sat with Aster and Nicholas on stools, he asked her a question which had nothing at all to do with cooks or wives.

"I still don't understand. The Gubbings are Puritans. But are all Puritans Gubbings?"

"Oh, no. Only a very few. We were the first, though. You see, when those gloomy old missionaries—Augustus and his flock—came from Rome in 597 A.D., they found us a fallen race. Literally. Feather Blight had moulted our feathers and most of them hadn't come back, even to later generations. The Celts had continued to be respectful. Once they had worshipped us as gods. They were still putting us into their stories as kings and queens. But the missionaries took one look at our useless wings and stormed "fallen angels," and we believed them. We actually believed them, it had been so long since we lost the power of flight. We had angered God, they said. He had thrown us out of heaven along with Lucifer. Thus, they explained our past—flight and Heaven—and our present—Hell on earth. There was only one thing to do, they said. Repent. We listened and repented. We have never ceased repenting even to this day. If a child began to develop a pair of wings which looked as if they might actually carry him aloft, they were clipped and trimmed; he was given a lecture on pride; and soon he was clipping his own wings. For a long time most of us stayed right here in Dartmoor because if we went out into the world, someone might discover what was left of our wings and accuse us of being witches or warlocks and hustle us off to a stake. But we *wanted* to go into the world and spread what we thought to be the word. It is all very well to repent of one's own sins. It is much more fun to make other people repent of theirs.

"It was during the reign of Elizabeth, bless her, that Judith's

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grandfather reached an important conclusion: *The first to cry witch is rarely accused of witchcraft.* Let us send missionaries out into a world which is rapidly tumbling back into paganism—why, look at Elizabeth, our so-called virgin queen. No more a virgin than Jezebel! Robe them in black like ourselves. Hide their wings. Stamp the fear of God on their faces. We did just that, and they set up such a cry about sin and the Devil and witches that no one—at least not very often—suspected *them*. You see, they were so sincere. They practiced what they preached. The first thing we knew there were Puritans all over England and even settling colonies in the New World. Now, only about one in a hundred Puritans comes from Dartmoor, though of course in Dean Church the number is much higher."

"One of these days," said Robin, "there's going to be a civil war. I can see the division in my own parish."

"Yes," said Stella, "and I hope the Puritans lose. Meanwhile, you had better keep your eye on the Cobbler and the Seamstress and the Blacksmith and—" She hesitated. Should she mention the worst of the lot?

"But you're not at all like your people. You *glow*," said Robin.

"At heart I'm Elizabethan like my late husband. And that's why Aster and I drank with you at the Harvest Home. Because you rescued Artor. And because you seemed Elizabethan too."

"Did you have to come back to Dartmoor?"

"I had Aster to think about. Without Philip it was unthinkable for a mother and daughter like us to remain alone in a city of sailors. As you doubtless know, a woman with even a modicum of looks can't walk down the street without being goosed—"

"Mama, you're being irreverent."

"Without being pinched or, shall we say, investigated, by a sailor. My wings are small enough for any modest garment to hide. But once you start investigating—well, there was constant threat of discovery."

"And worse," said Aster direly. "Things happen to women, you know, when they don't have husbands to protect them. But Mama, we've talked enough about dismal things. Why don't you play for us? Mama plays beautifully," she added. "The last man who asked for her hand in marriage said that she played like an angel before the fall. She sings too."

"I'm sure our guests would rather talk. I have one of Philip's pipes about the place. And some tobacco, I think, straight from the Colonies. Of course it's ten years old."

"Stella, please play for us." It was Robin. "You have the tiniest hands I ever saw on a woman. I see a music in them sweeter than a nightingale."

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"Very well," she smiled, acquiescing modestly though with a flush of pleasure. She would play "Halcyon." It was a love song as old as her people's history.

She sat at the stool before the clavicytherium. If she had been a vain woman, she would have thought: The firelight kindles my hair, drawn into a knot behind my head, and makes it seem to throb like a flame. My skirt of green velvet; my embroidered petticoat peeping naughtily below its rim; my bare shoulders, their freckles invisible except at close range: even though I wore the same gown when I lived in Exeter with Philip, and now I am thirty and a widow, it is surely more becoming than the white apron and the black pointed cap of a Puritan.

As it was, she thought: I am playing for Robin, and what he sees is less than he deserves but perhaps more than what he has found in Dean Church.

And so she played. The instrument itself was not powerful. It tinkled sweetly through the room, rather like a harp (though not, she hoped, as insipid as an angel's harp). But when she sang, the room became an orchard, and the treetops trembled with an April of birds. You could hear their wings, you could hear their songs; you could hear their pain at winter's theft, their exultation at the melting ice, the budding boughs, the building of nests.

A halcyon is my love,
Who nested on the sea,
But when I flung my cunning net,
My love eluded me.

A halcyon is my love,
Who nested on the sea,
But when I lifted open hands,
My love came down to me.

She rose from the stool, half apologetic; she had quite forgotten Aster and Nicholas. She had sung only to Robin; she had become her song.

"You must be very tired," she said. "Such a day you've had! The Trial—"

But no one was listening to her; looking at her, yes, but not listening to her words. Robin had started to cry. Philip had never cried, not even before his death. Gubbings would rather be locked in the stocks than cry. And yet this big, manly man was crying without shame and not even trying to hide his face or brush the tears with his hand.

She sank to her knees beside his stool. "Dearest Robin, how have I made you sad?"

"Usually," he said, almost with reluctance, "I like my vicarage, I like to hoe in my garden or play Hoodman's Blind with the children. Or preach a sermon even when the congregation goes to sleep and I have to throw my sermon at them. But sometimes I want to walk away to —otherwhere. A garden with bluebells and sunflowers. Sometimes I gather them in my arms

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or pile them in wicker arks, and they never wilt. I was there now. Free and yet companioned. Nicholas has already been there with me. But now there were four of us. 'But when I lifted open hands. . . .' Isn't it true of the truest love? It flings no nets."

Lightly she touched his hair. Unlike most of her people, she was not afraid of touch. His hair was thick and heavy and, like the rest of him, thoroughly masculine. She felt as if she were touching sprays of wheat.

"The garden is always there," she said. "We've only to climb the stile. But come to bed now. I'll fix a place for you in the upper story. It's cramped with millstones that don't grind, and cluttered with levers and cogs. I use it as a kind of butterie too, where I store my preserves and my butts of wine, my cheeses and my clothes. I don't know what it smells like. Rusty machines or food or both. But tonight it'll have to do. At least it's better than sleeping in the damp and cold under the mill, though I left two coverlits there and stuffed them with hay, in case any Gubbings come snooping about the place."

"You see," said Aster, "you can't sleep in the room with Mama and me because you're not married to us. It makes it terribly inconvenient. I expect you'll catch your death."

"I could even sleep in a stock," said Nicholas. He never complained about his leg, but his face looked white and drawn.

"Here, you must drink some of Mama's poppy head syrop. It will help to rest you. Then we must feed Artor."

The bear had not stirred from beside the cradle since Robin's tactless remark.

"May I give him a saffron cake?" asked Robin.

"Yes," Aster said doubtfully, "but watch your hand. He's been known to bite. He bit Judith on her calf when she said that animals haven't any souls."

"Of course they have souls. I have a pig named Caligula, and I expect to meet him in heaven. If I get there. He sleeps in my trundle when Nicholas isn't visiting.

He extended a cake as a peace offering. Artor pretended to sleep "When Nicholas is there, I make a bed for him by the hearth. It's just as comfortable. And the Candle-maker's widow is feeding him while I'm away."

Artor accepted the cake.

IT WAS ALMOST MORNING. Aster appeared to be sleeping with the soundness of youth though less with innocence than a kind of blissful anticipation. Robin and Nicholas, so she supposed, were sleeping among the rusted machines in the loft above her head. She had fixed two pallets for them, given them coverlits and a lantern, and promised tomorrow to transform the place into a solar while they were fixing

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the cogs or scraping rust or doing whatever was needed to make a mill start grinding after nine years of inactivity.

She stepped onto the porch. The first light of dawn had begun to flush the tors. Usually they resembled huge, jagged tombstones, but now they were what they had been to her ancestors before the fall, unabashedly phallic; earth's virility yearning to the fruitful sky. The pre-Christian Romans had said, "No, you have everything backwards. The earth is a mother, not a father; the sky is a god, not a goddess." The Christian Romans had said, "Everything is God, the Father; there is no female principle in nature." And the Christians after the fall of Rome: "Let's not speak of male *or* female principles, It's quite indelicate. Repent!"

For once she was not naked. The presence of guests, to say nothing of early-risen Gubbings who would watch the mill for indiscretions or, better, a full-fledged sin, required a certain decorum. She was wearing a nightdress which had come to her by way of Philip, who had raided a Spanish galleon (yes, the Spaniards were good for *something*), a billowy garment of satin and lace which looked as if it were sewn of spendrift and which, having been sewn in a Catholic country, disclosed nothing but intimated much. Aster had remarked when she went to bed, "What a shame Nicholas and Robin can't see you like this. Why, the way the green sets off your hair, you look almost young!"

Yes, what a shame. This morning the wind was worse than a chilly lover, he was a mere eunuch. Robin in the mill and she on the porch. The rarest time of day, the secret time, and she must waste it with her own uncompanionable thoughts.

But of course she had secretly guessed that he would come to join her. In fact, she had willed him to come. As Aster might have said, she had given him the eye, or at least the inclination. Not that she was a witch as Philip had laughed and half believed. But where was the woman, Gubbing or human, without her witchcraft? Last night she had said to Robin, "I stand on the porch every morning to greet the dawn," and now she waited for him with assurance that he would come but impatience at his delay.

He trod lightly on his bare feet, but she heard him even as he descended the ladder from the upper story. She did not turn to face him, however, until he stood beside her and she could no longer pretend to be unaware of his presence. He stood so close to her that she felt the heat of his body. Had she the nostrils of a human, she supposed, she would scent the maleness of him, the musky masculinity which Philip, with his usual directness, had told her other women scented in him. Perhaps it was just as well not to

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be assaulted by yet another sense. She was not a coquette; she was tongue-tied; she was terrified. There was such a thing as a forest fire. In the chill of the dawn, on that unprotected porch, he was clad in a loin-cloth. He might have been a Faun accosting her in the deep woods.

The impudence of the man! Julia, Corinna, all those other giggling rustic girls—perhaps after all he had taken his pleasure with them. A man who flaunted his nakedness—

"Stella, you old Puritan," she said to herself. "You sound like Judith. Disguising desire as disapproval. Philip would have lost patience with you."

She expected him to chaff with her; to banter and tease and tempt. It was the way of most attractive men; it had been Phllip's way when he hoped to bed her without wedding her.

He did not chaff. He looked like a little boy about to cry, this big, ruddy, almost naked man who stirred her more than Philip, because Philip had been the sort of man who had never seemed less or more than thirty; it was impossible to imagine him as a child or an old man. Robin, however, in spite of his size, seemed suddenly younger than Aster.

"St-Stella."

"Yes, Robin." She realized now that his nakedness was naturalness and not calculation; he did not know his own attraction.

"You saved my life. And Nicholas."

"I only made it possible for you to save yourself."

"Stella, why did you save my life?"

"Because I saw you swimming in a stream by moonlight. And I read the poem you left."

"Oh," he said, startled. "I hope you didn't wait until I climbed out on the bank."

"Yes."

"Do you think I'm running to fat? Vicars do. They eat a lot of beef."

"No."

"You weren't disappointed?"

"No."

"I never saw *you* swimming by moonlight. Do you?"

"No. I stand on my balcony."

"You mean like now. You look like a green morning glory!"

"No. I mean like you in the stream."

"Nude?"

"Naked."

"But that's a splendid thing to do! Why did you change your habit just this morning?"

"Because I have freckles."

"I like freckles. They make me think of strawberries."

"Truly, Robin? You don't prefer the milky whiteness of those simple-minded little things in Dean Church?"

"Too much milk turns my stomach."

"You mean you've seen their milky whiteness?"

"I don't mean anything of the kind. I mean *if* I saw it."

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A silence fell between them. She felt: the next thing I say must be—significant.

Fortunately, there was no need for her to say anything, significant or trivial. He kissed and encompassed her at the same time, and he was much too quick to be graceful or artful; he was sudden, turbulent, and total; and the years did not tremble back to Philip. It was now, Robin, tomorrow and tomorrow. She held him and felt as if she were holding a great armful of sunflowers. Why did she think of him in terms of gardens? He was anything but delicate and floral. It's because he's the earth, she thought, its strength without its cruelty. I am the sky, though almost wingless; he is the summer countryside, with its wheatfields and its gardens, its sweet ruggedness and its rough sweetnesses.

"You don't know about me," she said. "You haven't seen my wings. They're little and stubby and not tall and billowing as you might suppose."

"But you aren't a witch. You've already told me so."

"No."

"I'm glad. Not that I would mind if you were, except my position would make it difficult for us. A vicar and a witch—raised eyebrows, a crop in church attendance. But it's nice to have you—otherwise. You're not human then, are you? You're better. I knew there was something different about the Gubbings. Something under those dark robes."

"Not better. Just different. We were once called Skykings. Somehow the name turned into Gubbings. I expect the missionaries put 'grubbing' into it." She was not really thinking about the name of her people, however. She was thinking: He spoke as if he intended to take me home with him to Dean Church. To his vicarage. To be a vicar's wife. First, we'll have our own private ceremony before the altar of Picus and Mother Goose, with only Aster and Nicholas for witnesses. He seems to like me in green. Somehow I must manage to get some silk from Exeter, and I will leave an opening for my wings like the brides in the old time, and Aster shall read a passage from the Book of Rejoicing before it became the Book of Redemption. Then, a public wedding in his own church to satisfy *his* conscience. After all, he is a man of God, even if the wrong God.

"I don't know much about my own ancestry," he was saying. "Farmers, goldsmiths—possibly a Fawn or two a long way back. Will such a pedestrian lineage do?"

"I suspect you have at least one phoenix in your family tree. Even if you haven't—yes, you'll do, my dear."

"*Mama, we've got him!*" Aster pranced in the doorway. Her pale little features were flushed with triumph. "I heard everything. He's going to marry you. Ask him about Nicholas for me."

"*Marriage?*" It was more a yelp

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than a question. The sun had risen above the horizon, but the sunflowers looked as if they were ready to wilt.

Book Three: Robin

Chapter VIII

CRAMPED AMONG the cogs and gears, and the jars of marmalade sealed with pig's bladder, cold in spite of his coverlit, he had hardly slept all night. Once he had dozed but Nicholas had groaned in his sleep and Robin had pressed his hand and put to rout whatever demons or Gubbings disturbed his dreams. It had been a happy even if uncomfortable wakefulness, however, companioned as if in his secret garden by those he most loved. Nicholas, the son who had come to him late, and come in need. Stella, the woman whose name meant star. If Nicholas lay beside him, it was Stella who possessed the dark above him, her wings tall and unfettered, and she was smiling and leading him by the hand.

"Sweetest love," she said. "We have a journey to make."

"To the moon? To the star where you found your name?"

"Not nearly so far. Just to the next field. See, where the sunflowers are twittering with sparrows."

"Sparrows are quarrelsome birds."

"You don't understand them. They're talking, not quarreling."

"Can Nicholas come too? He limps, you know."

"Yes, Nicholas can come too, and he won't need his crutches."

HE HEARD HER STIRRING directly under him. He gave her time to perform whatever rituals of dress began a woman's day; he expected them to be intricate and endless from his experience with certain accessible young women he had known in London. But the room was quiet before she had even had time to preen in a mirror. She must have walked onto the porch. Perhaps at last they could talk without being interrupted or overheard. Forgetting his tunic and sandals, he scrambled down the ladder and, scrupulous not to awaken Aster, stepped onto the porch. He almost fell over the railing in his eagerness to join her. Clumsy Robin! Artor could teach him grace. He had so much wanted to greet her with a pretty speech, a bow from the waist, a courtly gesture: Raleigh to her Elizabeth.

But after the first awkwardness, her beauty—lord, what sinful ankles!—had loosened his tongue. ("A sweet disorder in the dress kindles in clothes a wantonness.") And then the confession that she loved him. She, the uncrowned queen, loved this big, awkward fellow who stumbled over his own feet and who preached in a country parish where farmers thought that Catullus was a new kind of

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cover crop. It was not the first time a woman had claimed to love him; many women had made such a claim. But he could never forget Anna, his prettiest cousin, saying to him when he was a boy and frantically in love with her, "Robin, you ought to be a farmer, not a goldsmith. You can make a daisy grow out of a stone, but you can't even put a clasp on a bracelet!" Then she had married his closest friend, who became the best goldsmith in London.

But Stella truly loved him. They would find a way to escape from Dartmoor and go to Dean Church or Exeter or London, or take a voyage to one of those lands of Philip's adventurings. His thoughts reeled in a benign bacchanalia, a banquet of the senses. Stella, the star; Stella, the woman, whose body was Eden without prohibitions even for snakes. Every apple ripe to be plucked!

And then that precocious child had appeared in the door and shouted, "Mama, we've got him."

He felt like a stag at bay. Hounds at his hooves, hunters just over the hill. Rescue, asylum, supper, and talk about love: all, all a conspiracy, mother and daughter conspiring together to lure him into their "cunning net." Till now, he had not rejected, he had simply ignored, the prospect of marriage. He had seen too many smug little brides dragging big, free-striding boys to the altar because of a night in the hay. He had visited too many cottages where smug little brides turned into shrewish old wives and their husbands turned to ale. There *were* happy marriages. His dead parents were said to have been happy (though his father had jumped out of a window for unaccountable reasons when Robin was an infant). But for every free and blissful union, there were a hundred inquisitorial dungeons. It was the cold legality of the institution which repelled him; the finality, enduring even into Heaven (or Hell?), if one could believe certain unmarried churchmen. The Elizabethan in him cried: "Love because you will." His own church, even more the Puritans, cried, "Love because of sentences—a sentence—imposed by a minister."

He had been a chaplain and he was now a vicar; he always shuddered when he had to speak those irrevocable words over a callow couple who beamed at each other as if marriage were daffodils and daisies, when it was more likely to be bracken and nettles.

"The sun is up," said Stella. "We ought to go in or we'll be seen." Her skin was so pale that the freckles on her cheeks looked like strawberries floating in milk. He felt a smarting of pity; it was hard for her, being exposed in her connivance. Still, she *had* connived.

They walked silently into the houseplace. Last night's joy —where had it gone? Mother

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Goose had departed, the music had fled from the clavicytherium. The keyboard looked as if it would growl instead of tinkle, and Stella looked as if she would rather sing hymns than "Halcyons."

"Bring Nicholas down and I'll fix breakfast. Will moorhen eggs do?"

"Yes, thank you, Stella."

At breakfast, Nicholas stared from Robin to Stella to Aster, but no one said a word. Finally Aster said darkly, "Nicholas, your friend turned us down. I expect Mama will have to marry a Gubbing now."

"See to the dishes, Aster." (Personally, he would have liked to spank the girl, though he supposed that he ought to be grateful for her warning.) "I promised Judith a new apron. I'll take it to her this afternoon." Her voice quavered when she turned to Robin. "Will you and Nicholas have a look at the machinery? If we don't get the mill to grinding, you may face another trial."

"I had a look at it last night," he said. "The cog wheel is all right except for a little rust. So is the brake wheel. It's the wallowers which is broken. It looks as if the last miller lost his temper and kicked it. I found some spare parts in an old sack, though, and I think you can even grind peas in a day or two. You'll have peas, porridge *and* flour."

"Forget the peas. Just so we can grind wheat."

Robin and Nicholas toiled over the machinery for the rest of the morning. The wallowers had to be straightened and oiled, rust had to be chipped from the brake wheel right on down to the stone nuts (which were not made of stone; they got their name because they turned the grinding stones). Most of the time Nicholas sat on the wooden floor and chipped with an iron chisel while Robin bent, replaced, and hammered. Between hammerings, and after a discreet silence, Nicholas asked:

"What happened, Robin? You hardly said a word to Stella at breakfast. She looked as if she wanted to cry."

"Stella wants a husband."

"You mean she came right out and asked you? But it's for you to do the asking!"

"No, she didn't ask me herself, and it's *not* for me to do the asking, since I don't want a wife. But Aster spoke in behalf of her mother."

"You might do worse," said Nicholas. "I don't much care for moorhen eggs, but that was a fine pork pie last night."

"I might do worse, but I'm not going to do at all."

He did not tell Nicholas about Aster's own net. There was no point in terrorizing him when the girl would not be a real menace for several years.

"Well," said Nicholas cheerfully, "I guess we can make do on our own."

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"Nicholas, are you disappointed? Did you have your heart set on marrying me off?"

"No," said Nicholas without hesitation. "I never really wanted you to marry Stella in the first place. I like her very much. She makes me think of my mother, if my mother hadn't been a Puritan. She's a good cook. And she's the best prospect you've had. But *nobody* is good enough for you. And we would have had to take Aster too. Sometimes I almost get the feeling that little girl has me staked out for herself." A perceptive boy, Nicholas. "She has that look about her. Do you know what I mean? Patient and predatory. If she's begun to stalk at nine, you can imagine what she'll be like at fifteen."

"Thirteen, I would think. They marry young in these parts."

"God protect us from matrimonial women."

They chipped and hammered.

IT WAS AFTERNOON. Stella was carrying the finished apron, "white as an angel's wing" according to Judith's specifications, and Robin was carrying the first sack of flour from the resurrected mill. They had left Nicholas (wary) and Aster (patient) to prepare dinner.

Half a mile of bracken lay between them and the town of the Gubbings. They followed a tortuous, sometimes sodden path which Stella charitably called the Heath Road. There were daisies among the stalks of bracken, little white moths of bloom among those skeletons. But Robin hardly noticed them; he noticed the skeletons.

"Robin," said Stella when Nicholas and Aster could no longer hear them. "I'm sorry about what Aster said on the porch. I never set out to trap you. But I did hope to marry you. From the time we drank together at the Harvest Home. You must try not to blame me too much. You see, my dear, I'm lonely. It's been such a long time since Philip died."

"Are you, Stella? You seemed so contented with the mill."

"Oh, sometimes I was. But what is contentment except an absence of sorrow? It isn't happiness. You know that too. Or why do you swim alone in the streams at night?"

"I'm not sure," he confessed.

"You're looking for something you don't find in your vicarage, in your flock, even with your nieces and nephews and pig. It's the same with me. It's why I stand on the porch in the morning. Nine years, and no one to really talk to except Aster. The Gubbings never say what they mean. I've had my ankles ogled until I wanted to lift my petticoat, lower a stocking, and flash a naked knee! I've even been pinched in the Tabernacle. But do you think they would admit that they want me as anything except a begetter of little Gubbings? They'd as soon let their hair grow as long as the

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King's. As for the women, Judith used to be my friend, and sometimes we still have chats, but I always feel as if she's hoping to find a wrinkle."

"She won't find any."

"Not yet. Soon, though. How does your poem go? I heard that little simpleton, What's-her-name, the one with the outsized bosom, reciting it to a friend while they were gleaning in the fields one day. Of course she said it badly. She sounded like a chicken with the pip. But I do remember a few lines:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying. . . ."

Robin took up the verse:

And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

"In other words," she said, "I fancied you, Robin. And I rather hoped you would consider me a rosebud, even though I had already been gathered once."

He dropped the sack of flour and tried to make up his mind whether he should shake her or kiss her. He ended by gripping her shoulders—and sniffing her sweetness of lavendar and storax—and feeling the warmth of her hidden wings—and waiting, wanting—more than a vicar should want. Now they had come to a clump of Cornish Heath, its four- and five-pronged leaves punctuated with pink flowers. But he himself felt like a Twisted Heath, beaten by the wind and splattered with mud. It was not the walk which had put him in such a state.

"Oh, Stella, you're so much more than a rosebud. You're a full-blown blossom and I do want to gather you!"

"I know you do," she said. "But I also know what you mean by gathering."

"It's been two years since I bedded a girl," he said forlornly. "If *that* isn't forebearance. And it's not as if I haven't had chances." He *had* had chances, and not just Corinna and Julia and most of their friends. Lady Margaret, resplendent in lace, who rode from her manor house in the country to hear his sermons. The Candle-maker's widow who said that she was tired of making candles. . . .

"I know you have. I rather expected that little simple What's-her-name to gather *you*, she was so brazen. I respect your forebearance with her."

"Anyway, you weren't going to be like the other women. I was thinking about taking you away to Exeter and finding a cottage for you. A *permanent* cottage."

"You would have to keep me secret from your parishioners, and I'm not meant to be a secret woman. Do you expect me to be a latter-day Whore of Babylon? I don't want to be kept, I want to be shown. Philip was proud of

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me."

"And so am I. We could move to London. I could give up the Church. It isn't what it was, not with all these Puritans like rats in the rafters. I could become a goldsmith like my uncle. You know, I was apprenticed to him for six years." He did not tell her how many carkanets he had bent or smashed, how many pomander bracelets he had forgotten to spice.

"Robin," said Stella, "when a woman has had heaven, do you expect her to settle for limbo?"

"I've been called lots of things, but never limbo. I think I would prefer to be called Hell. At least it's scarlet instead of gray."

"I didn't mean you were gray. You're like a rainbow. I only meant that having been one man's wife, how can I be another man's woman?"

"I thought you said you were an Elizabethan. Did Elizabeth hesitate to take Essex for a lover? And did her subjects object until he got political aspirations? You don't think they really thought she was a virgin all those years, or wanted her to be? Those were lusty times. Marriage, on the other hand, is like a four-poster bed with the curtains drawn. Depending on your company, it may be cozy, it may be cold, but either way you can't help wondering what's going on outside."

"I'm lusty, Robin, but I'm not lustful."

"Well, I'm lusty and lustful too. I want to drag you behind the nearest tor. It's your own fault for looking as if your mother were an angel and your father were a Faun."

"But Robin, there aren't any female angels. You're a vicar. You ought to know that. They're either male like Gabriel or in-between."

A poet does not welcome criticism of his similes—not when he is unsuccessfully attempting seduction.

"And what's so sacred," he snapped, "about a few words mumbled by a man no better than I am? I've mumbled them often enough myself, God forgive me. Besides, you aren't even a Christian. I thought that in the old time your people loved freely and merrily and with no sense of sin."

"It's true. They did. Just like the Fauns and the Dryads the Romans told us about. But I'm not of the old time and not of the new time either. I'm me, Stella, and no one else."

"You're a Puritan." He regretted the hateful words as soon as they left his tongue, but she was maddening him to distraction. To look incomparably delectable, even to set the table, then to turn him away from the feast!

"No, I'm not a Puritan. The Puritans think you have to get married in order to have sex, and you shouldn't have sex even when you get married unless you want to beget. I don't say anybody else has to marry. My best friend in

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Exeter was a harlot. I respected her far more than I respect Judith. Speaking for myself, though, I'll risk the four-poster bed—posters, curtains, and all."

"Women don't feel as men do, or they wouldn't haggle at a time like this."

"What do you mean, Robin?"

"I mean I'm on fire!"

"Where, Robin?"

"In the pelvis, where else?"

"But of course women feel the same as men at such a time. My race has always been known for its strong but sensitive pelvises. The way the bones come together, don't you know. Philip said that I had an admirable pelvis. How did he phrase it? Something about a pinnace and a snug harbor. Right now I feel as if there were fireships in my harbor."

"What are you going to do about them?"

"Let them burn, I suppose, since there doesn't seem to be a bucket at hand."

"Bell, you mean. Not bucket. Wedding bell." The obstinacy of the woman! The unmitigated cruelty! All those strawberries hidden in a black robe, till they shriveled and dried into dust. "Why, Stella, why?"

A Gubbing farmer leaned on his hoe and stared at them with a look between speculation and suspicion. A falcon lumbered out of a thicket of bracken. A gyrfalcon. Such a lordly bird! The first bird of any kind which he had seen in Dartmoor.

"Is it the wedding ceremony you want?" he pursued. "The ritual, the gown, the audience?"

"Yes, I would like a wedding," she admitted. "A private one, though, with a few words spoken from the Book of Rejoicing. Simple words, but beautiful. The same as when the Woodpecker God wedded the Lark Goddess. He was quite the popinjay in his youth. But once he married he never strayed from the nest. And yes, I would like to look my best for you in a green gown with a crimson stomacher, and with my wings showing through like flames. You've never seen my wings."

"No."

"They're small but they're just the color of my hair. If you like red."

"Very much."

"And I want a wedding feast with fermented myrrh and sunflower cakes. I like tradition. I like ceremony, so long as it's a silken robe to be worn lightly and not a wool surplice."

"And that's why you want to be married?"

"That's only one reason. The least important. I want to be married because it's a way of saying thank you to Picus. Thank you for the harvest, thank you for the vintage, thank you even for earth's white sleep in winter. You see, Robin, the seasons turn but they always return. It's Picus' way of telling us, 'What sleeps, awakens.

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What's lost is found. Whenever you doubt me, ask yourselves a question: Have I ever misplaced an April?' So it all comes down to this. Marriage—and the parenthood which follows—is a way of saying grace to Picus, or to your Christian God, who I suspect is really the same fellow under his feathers. Didn't his only son ascend into heaven? How did he get there unless he flew? Marriage is a grace and a promise never to doubt that the world, however muddled it seems to us at times, runs like a beautifully wrought waterclock (not that abomination in the square)."

"And if I promised always to love you, wouldn't you believe me?"

"I think I would. But marriage is also a way of telling other people you've made the promise."

"To win their approval?"

"Robin, Robin, I don't give a feather if other people approve of me, except for you and Aster and Nicholas. But everyone who truly marries is proud of his union; he wants to share and affirm with others like himself."

Robin was silent when she finished her plea. It seemed a profanation to answer her with anything less than a poem or a psalm. It would be a long time before he complained about talkative women—not when they talked like Stella. Now they were approaching the tors which surrounded the town. The afternoon sun touched the dark granite to roseate flickerings. The thought came to Robin that the tors were giant Gubbings in dark surplices; the flickerings were the passions which they could not hide. Love, anger, envy, hate. The actual Gubbings were about their work in the fens which passed for fields—cutting sod, hoeing, mining for tin—but no one was quite close enough to overhear them.

"I think I understand. You're a rare woman, Stella. But I guess I'm afraid of marriage. I guess I'm a coward."

"Step closer to me, Robin. That falcon we saw—he's directly over us now. He looks as if he might attack you."

Indeed, the bird seemed poised to drop on his head! His talons looked like hooks, and his beak—well, Robin would have preferred to be stabbed with a dirk.

"But what about you?"

"He seems to fancy me. I think I've seen him before. First at the Harvest Home. Then near the mill."

"But you said there weren't any birds in Dartmoor."

"There weren't. And this one is going away. Now, as to what you were saying about your cowardice. No, my dear, you're not a coward. You're already so burdened with love that you hesitate to take on the additional burden of marriage, and for you it would be difficult, even if beautiful, because you take your loves so seriously. You see, Robin, there are

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some people who love too easily. Every sunset moves them to tears. Every sunrise makes them laugh. They are good and gracious people, but they fall out of love as easily as they fall in. You aren't such a person. You've added love to love without ever subtracting, you've filled the jewel casket of your heart with topaz upon opal upon calcedon without ever misplacing a stone. Your nieces and nephews who come to visit you—Nicholas has told me about them. You love them as if they were your own children. And just in the last few days, you've come to love Nicholas as a friend and little brother and son all at once. You want to heal his leg; you ache when he aches; you think that one more big love will be more aches than you can bear. It will assault you like an Armada, and it won't be scattered by a providential storm."

"I'm afraid you over rate me, Stella. I'm as fickle as the next man, and a poor excuse for a vicar."

"You don't fool me with your light, bantering poetry. Oh, it's part of you, a very real part. There's a joy in you as pure as a wheatfield amber in the sun! But I know the solid red earth under the wind-froclicked wheat. The wheat may be harvested but the earth abides. Hush now, Robin. Everybody is looking at us. That old man has been leaning on his hoe for the last five minutes, and you can be sure he isn't thinking about beets. Look stern and dutiful or people will think we've sinned. Or know it. They think it already of every man and woman who smile at each other."

"We haven't smiled at each other since early morning."

She pressed his hand. "I won't burden you with a wife," she whispered, "but I will burden you with another friend. May I come next to Nicholas?"

"Goodness," said Judith, erupting from behind a tor like a spurt of black lava. She should have said "badness," to judge from her face. She was staring a crucifixion at Stella, and staring—dear God, could it be matrimony?—at him. "You two look positively ashen. Is the mill not working? Or have you something to confess?"

Robin flung the sack of flour at her feet. It burst at the seams and a fine white powder splattered her gown. She looked at him in angry astonishment.

"I ground it, you bake it," he snapped, seizing Stella's hand and hurrying her back toward the mill.

Chapter IX

SUPPER, UNLIKE BREAKFAST, was not eaten in gloom. There were no intimacies; there was no music; Mother Goose had not returned to bestow a benediction on the household; but there was a charfish as delectable as last night's pork, and there was the

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shared if unspoken assumption that they were to allow no personal complications, misunderstandings, disappointments to interfere with their plans for escape from Dartmoor. It was difficult; complications threatened even if they did not quite erupt into the conversation. Robin's brain was like a hay stack assaulted by a wind devil: thoughts awhirl, straws in every direction. Was a four-poster bed, even with drawn curtains, not after all superior to a trundle bed? Was Stella a saint or a goddess or merely the most maddeningly desirable woman he had ever met? The sheer fragrance of her excited his heart to pound like a moth trapped in a lantern.

As for Stella, she never once alluded to their confrontation of the morning and their conversation of the afternoon (but why did she have to lean so perilously close to him when she was serving the bread? Why did she have to wear another gown from Exeter, its skirt fashionably opened in front to reveal a kirtle embroidered with a nest and green intertwining branches?). She treated him with the familiar affection of a sister (but why did she flash her ankles whenever she crossed the room?). She talked about tin-mining in the tors. "The Gubbings use tin for their crucifixes—the little ones they place above their doors." She talked about baking bread. "I learned how to bake from my friend, the harlot. You remember." (Yes, he remembered). "A scattering of pumpkin seeds never hurts." But the music of her voice alchemized the tin and turned the bread into cake.

Nicholas was no help when he asked: "Aren't pumpkin seeds an aphrodisiac? I read that in some Latin author, I believe. The Roman emperors never liked to give up, you know."

"Aphrodisiacs, did you say? I wondered why the Gubbing men seem to relish my bread."

"Am I intruding?"

Someone had entered the room. No one had heard her climb the stairs; she had not even knocked; she had simply materialized as silently as a shadow. Now she stood in the doorway, stern and solidified, until entry became possession.

It was Judith.

It was Eris, goddess of discord. When the gods excluded her from the wedding of Thetis and Peleus, she showed such "suspicion, discontent, and strife" that the whole Hellenic world exploded into the Trojan War. If Judith could not begin a war, she could arrange a masterful crucifixion.

"I knocked on the door," she said, "but you must not have heard me. You were talking about aphrodisiacs, I believe, and Stella was revealing one of her culinary secrets." She evaluated the room with a woman's ability to note a hundred details in one rapid and all-inclusive look.

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"So this is what you've done to the mill. I must say you've shown a taste for Sybaritic luxury." She noted the wainscot table-chair, the trundle bed with its coverlit like a rich tapestry of Skykings wheeling among the clouds, the cushioned stools, particularly the clavicytherium. "I understand that our late and unlamented Elizabeth used to play that instrument."

"It sounds like a harp," said Robin.

"Oh? Of course I've never heard a clavicytherium, but I should imagine it would sound like one of those harps which fell out of heaven with Lucifer and our own unfortunate ancestors. Melodious but warped. And this is the bread you were discussing." She pointed to the loaf as if it were a stone phallus.

"Yes'" said Aster. "Nicholas told us about the pumpkin seeds being aphrodisiacs. He's very clever. He read it in a Latin author." Aster's knowledge of aphrodisiacs was limited. Probably she confused them with the diet of the goddess Aphrodite. But Judith winced as if the child had said "orgy" or "Priapus."

"Indeed! You may give me a portion of fish, but I will forego the bread."

A silence fell on the table, and Judith filled it—captured it, one might say—with the avidity of an eagle pouncing on a lark.

"You know, Master Herrick, Stella and I are exactly the same age. We were friends together before her sojourn in Exeter." She made the sojourn in Exeter sound like a visit to the fleshpots of Babylon.

"She told me," said Robin stoutly. "I undertands her late husband Philip voyaged as far as Virginia and Massachusetts. It was men like him who made it possible to found the colony at Plymouth." That should silence her. After all, Plymouth was notoriously Puritan.

But Judith did not choose to pursue the subject of voyages and colonies. "Before she left for Exeter, we both received offers of matrimony from upstanding young Gubbings. She declined for the sake of adventure, I for the sake of the church. But then, Robin"—it was the first time that she had used his given name, and in speaking to him now she seemed to exclude everyone else in the room—"you have made a similar renunciation, haven't you?"

"Yes," he admitted, "though less complete than your own."

"Don't belittle yourself," she continued. "However we differ in our views, we both serve a church and we both have renounced freedom, adventure, matrimony, and parenthood."

"You didn't have to renounce a husband," said Aster. "Or weren't you asked?"

"But we never regret our sacrifice, our renunciation, do we, Robin?" she continued, as if Aster

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were no more animate than a table or a stool.

"No, Mistress Judith." Something was happening to him. Unwelcome but not uncommon. He feared her for Stella's sake; he feared her because she would turn on him and Nicholas at the first hint of escape. But he had learned to respect her during the Trial by Rhyme and now he was beginning to pity her. It was not because she was flattering him at the expense of his friends; it was because she felt the need to flatter him; to flirt in her fumbling, Puritan way; it was because he recognized her need, denied, thwarted, but pathetically feminine and, in spite of her wings, human. Oh, she was not to be compared with Stella. Even if she had gone to Exeter and found a husband, she might have turned into a nag and a scold. But she was a woman with not a little beauty lingering under her robe—you could tell as much from her ankles—you could tell a lot about a woman from her ankles. Her heart was twisted like wind-battered bracken, but perhaps there were daisies among the skeletal stalks. Like most men, he thought that there was nothing sadder than an aging virgin.

Fortunately, she soon alarmed him into forgetting his pity.

"Well, I shan't stay for dessert, though I expect you're having one of those dishes they serve in the taverns of Exeter. A West Country tart, no doubt. Judging from your furnishings and your table fare, Stella, *one would almost think that you had been to court.*" Such a comment, delivered with a gracious smile, might have been a compliment in London. Coming from a king-despising Puritan in Dartmoor, it was the ultimate condemnation. No, she managed a further thrust. "The court of Elizabeth, the bitch queen, not our bumbling Charles. You needn't see me to the door, Robin." He had not intended to see her to the door. He had been too angry in behalf of Stella. "We shall meet again very soon, I expect."

Stella sighed when Judith had left the mill. If her wings had been visible and had they been long and willowy as he imagined, instead of short and stubby as Stella claimed, he supposed that they would be dragging the floor.

"She has grounds for a new trial."

"What have we done?"

"For one thing, you and Nicholas are supposed to be my apprentices, and since you're male, I'm supposed to feed you under the mill, not in it. I have no doubt she poked around down there and decided you're sleeping in the upper story, if not in this very room."

"But we left some blankets and coverlits."

"And forgot to rumple them."

"Is that all?"

"It's quite enough. But she is

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also the first Gubbing ever to see the interior of this mill since I came to occupy it. This room. The Book of Redemption doesn't treat such matters specifically. But it reads: 'Live with the sweet frugality of the blackbird, who flaunts no plumage, neither of self nor nest.' In the Book of Rejoicing, of course, the passage refers to a priest, not a layman, and it continues, 'But compensates by disporting with his mate in amorous and uncaged delight.' But the censors saw to *that*."

"And to Judith, we must seem to be living more like pheasants than blackbirds."

"Exactly."

"But you're a queen, Stella. She can't touch you and Aster, can she?"

"If there are fallen angels, there must be fallen queens. She can always give me a push. If anyone is safe, I think it must be you. Provided you take the necessary measures."

"Me?" Somehow she made "measures" sound like "antidotes," a draft of hemlock, a pinch of wolfsbane.

"It was the way she looked at you."

"As if she would like to save my soul?"

"Your body."

"It's a good thing she didn't see him naked in the moonlight," interjected Aster.

"She saw enough. Her imagination is very vivid. I remember as a girl she would point out a Gubbing boy and say to me: 'His plumage is russet—much prettier than his beet-red hair' or 'His wings have points as sharp as spears' or 'He's as naked as a human—not a feather anywhere!' She didn't need to see, she imagined, and once we *did* see, you might say we peeped, and she was right, he was naked as a human. You can be sure, Robin, that she knows what you look like from your golden hair right on down to your pelvis. As much as *I* know."

"What are we going to do?"

"Do? Why, escape from Dartmoor, what else?" She did not try to hide her excitement. She must have had such a look when she walked to Exeter as a girl. She looked like a fallen angel about to recover the power of flight.

Robin deliberated. Escape from Dartmoor. Stella and Aster exposed to a hostile world. Either they must continue to dress and perform like Puritans to avert suspicion, or they must dress as became their femininity and risk exposure as witches. Stella's beauty, unsheathed, would make her particularly vulnerable. Men would like an excuse to fondle and undress her, and while she could no doubt resist the undressing, an impertinent hand might stray to her wings, and then the damning cry, "A witch, a witch!"

"It's all my fault," said Robin. "If I hadn't come blundering in here with Nicholas, you could have gone right on living in your

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mill."

"You didn't blunder, you were lured. If we only get you safely out of the place, I'll be eternally grateful. I'll offer a basket of acorns to Picus."

"And I'll say a prayer to Mother Goose," said Aster, looking at Nicholas as if they had already plighted their troth.

"In the autumn," said Stella, "the cuckoos migrate to Africa. We can do without their song through the winter. But oh, when they return in spring! It's enough to make you cry." (They had made Robin cry as late as the summer. Had she noticed his tears the night when he bathed in the stream?) "You think you brought me danger. Perhaps you did. But I would rather be an eagle beleagured by a storm than a fledgling which never left the nest. And I believe Aster feels the same way."

"Oh, yes." (Looking at Nicholas.) "Beleaguer me all you like."

"Before we escape," said Stella, "we must look to Nicholas' leg. It hurts me to see him limp, and I suspect I have just the remedy. The Gubbings bring their children to me in the Tabernacle and I've had considerable success with certain remedies suggested in the Book of Rejoicing. I've even helped the mothers with a difficult lay or hatch. In Dean Church, I expect, they would think I had learned my skills from Satan." She settled him in the trundle and proceeded to open the tall-legged chest, which contained an assortment of fragrant vials and jars.

Aster scurried across the room to hold Nicholas' hand.

"Why don't you wash the supper dishes for your mother?" he suggested.

"Would you like a stiff drink of ale?"

"No. Not if Robin will sit by me."

Six bears could not have dragged Robin from Nicholas' side. He would have broken his own leg to free the boy from this crutches.

Aster tackled the dishes with a glare which would have done credit to Judith and set up a clatter of wood and pewter.

"And we can plan our escape while you're working on my knee," said Nicholas.

"It's a simple enough remedy," said Stella. "You've drunk rose-tip wine, haven't you? Well, you simply mix it with juice from the flowers of the Angels Trumpet Tree and a dash of Devil's Wort—I rather like the symbolism—and massage it into the skin. You have to massage briskly and hard. Manipulate too. It has to penetrate all the way to the bone. And then it's a few days before you start to show any improvement. By the way, you've been very well treated up to now. I can see the handiwork of a skilful apothecary. The swelling is gone. There's little redness. All I

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have to do is complete what he began. Was it your father?"

"It was Robin."

"I should have known it wasn't your fahter." She began to massage his leg with unerring but necessarily hurtful hands. When Nicholas winced, she bent and kissed him on the cheek. "You're very brave. You haven't cried out once. Do, if you like."

"I don't need to," he said. "Not with you and Robin here."

Stella's concern for the boy was as evident in her face as in her fingers, and Robin watched her less with desire than adoration. He would have liked to put her in a shrine and kneel to her. He would have liked to bring her offerings of acorns and sunflowers. He was not ashamed that he had wanted her as his woman and not his wife. But at least for the moment his feelings were altogether bodiless. A woman like Stella, an infinite woman, could awake an infinity of responses in a man. Whether you worshipped Picus or the Christian god, you had to admit (unless you were a Puritan) that a desirable body was meant to be desired. An admirable spirit was meant to be admired.

"The Gubbings patrol the moors," she said. "At night with lanterns and pikes. Will-o-the-Wisps, you call them in Dean Church, and they are quite as dangerous as you imagine. By day they are careful not to be seen by outsiders, but there are just as many of them, and their pikes are just as deadly. Anyone who gets past them does so because they let him. Like you and Nicholas. Now they won't let you. With a reasonable excuse, Aster and I can come and go as we choose. But only until Judith brings charges against us in the Tabernacle. She will probably wait until the town meeting tomorrow afternoon. So we still have a little time to make our plans."

"If we can only get to Dean Church," said Robin. "I know there are Gubbings in the village, and Puritans who aren't Gubbings like Nicholas' parents. But mostly there are good old Anglicans. We can get some horses and ride to Exeter. Take ship to France, if we like. I have a little money left to me by my mother."

"What about this?" said Stella. "Aster and I will manage to lose Artor again and prod him in the direction of Dean Church. We'll meet you in the field where they held the Harvest Home and then make further plans. But first there's the matter of Judith. You and Nicholas can't get out of Dartmoor except with her help."

"I don't dislike the woman," said Robin, "But she reminds me of the neighbor's cat who ate my pet sparrow, Phil. She was only doing what comes natural to cats, but I always felt uncomfortable with her after that. I feel the same way with Judith. If she were simply wicked, I would know where I stood with her."

"She isn't simply anything,

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she's a very complicated woman. Do you pity her, Robin?"

"When I remember what she was, yes. A kitten instead of a cat. Milk before it has turned sour. But I fear her too. Knowing what she's missed, there's no telling what she might do. Kittens grow claws. Sour milk turns the stomach."

"But that's the point. You must make her remember what she's missed. You must make her wonder if just possibly she might still get it—and more."

"I don't understand." He understood perfectly. "Get what?"

"You. You'll have to sweet-talk her into trusting you."

"*Allure* her," put in Aster.

"And use her in your escape."

It went against his grain, using a woman; worse, using his masculinity against her. It downright disgusted him. "In other words I'm to be a—"

"Seducer," said Stella. "You won't actually have to seduce. But you must—well, be your natural charming self. Flatter her a bit. Compliment her hymns. Better yet, compliment her beauty. Gubbings aren't supposed to be vain, but Judith is as proud of her ankles as a London trollop. Let her do the rest, and she *will*, I promise. I've seen her look at you. Remember," she added, "four lives are at stake. Have you ever seen a crucifixion?"

"I've seen witches burned at the stake."

"Crucifixion hurts less but it hurts longer. Or so I'm told."

"Very well then," he sighed. "I'll do my best to flatter her, though her hymns are execrable."

"You're sure Robin won't actually have to—er—?" Nicholas stammered.

"Reasonably sure," said Stella. "But Judith is a beautiful and demanding woman. If it comes to that—"

Robin refused to complete the sentence for her. It seemed to him that he was about to embark upon the unmanliest escape in the history of Christendom.

"Robin, to save you and Nicholas and Aster I would willingly give myself to any Gubbing in Dartmoor, even to that horrid little Miller whose face looks like a wormy beet. A body is flesh and bones and feathers, nothing more. Call it the cottage of the soul if you will, but I still maintain that you can muddy the cottage without muddying the soul; burn it without burning the soul."

The damnable practicality of the woman! But he had to admit that she was right; he, the male, the sentimentalist, was wrong. He could not afford a show of masculine pride.

"All right, Stella. But I've grown fond of my cottage, and fonder of yours, which incidentally is more like a manor house. Let's hope there are no invasions."

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Chapter X

ALL OF THE sod-built houses of Dartmoor looked more or less identical: severe, vineless, cylindrical, rather as if a large black bird with little imagination had built them to house her eggs and then upended them. Judith's house appeared to have been built by the least imaginative bird, and to hold not even colorless eggs.

The one-room interior, however, did not match the bleak exterior; in fact, it was a distinct surprise. The sod was faced with earthenware tiles; there was a cleanliness which was more than merely cold and a neatness which was more than merely circumspect, and an indefinable something which could only be called taste. It was true that you had to search. The wooden stools were not upholstered with velvet. The bed, heavy with a black quilt, possessed neither a canopy nor a trundle. There was a chest of unpainted, uncarved oak which looked rather like a big chunk of wood that a forester, not a carpenter, had hewn and lost.

But—and herein lay the surprise—there was a wicker cage inhabited by a lark. Robin would have expected a crow, but no, it was a lark. He did not look joyful, but then he looked as joyful as any bird in any cage; that is to say, resigned. Certainly he was well supplied with water (in a thimble) and with sunflower seeds (in a snuff box). It seemed to Robin that the bird typified its mistress. Judith feared beauty; if she included it in her house, she enclosed it in a cage, just as she caged her own body. But the beauty was undeniable. He felt the urge to start opening cages. But alas, he had come to close them.

"Mistress Judith," he said when she greeted them at the door. "Nicholas and I would like to ask a favor."

"I knew you were coming," she said. "My people alerted me soon after you left the mill. I rather expected Stella. After what I saw last night, I expected her to presume on our former friendship and—"

He saw that he must choose his words with speed and discretion. The crucifix at her throat reflected ominously in her eyes.

"We want you to show us around Dartmoor. We want to see how you farm and mine tin." He did not add: And patrol the area against invaders. "In short, if we're going to live here, we want to know the place and make ourselves useful."

"I should think you would find your hands full at the mill. What with repairing machinery and grinding flour—and dining with your mistress in the evening." She managed to give to "mistress" the connotation of "strumpet."

"The machinery is running smoothly and we've ground all the wheat your farmers have brought

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us." The Gubbings were clumsy farmers. In their lighter moods (so Stella had told him), that is to say, when the stocks were full, they joked among themselves that they had a "black thumb." "Until they bring us more, we have nothing to do. As your Book of Redemption says, the Devil finds work for idle wings." He had hurriedly scanned the book before his visit and, being a vicar, memorized some verses.

"The word is 'hands,' not 'wings.'" (He recalled with dismay that he had confused the version in the Book of Redemption with that in the Book of Rejoicing.) "And couldn't your mistress find you work preparing the meals you share with her? All those lavish preparations. And such serving vessels I never saw! No earthenware for Stella. Silver pots and spoons!"

"Pewter. No, we're dining very simply today. Water cress and clap bread, I understand. *Under* the mill. As for our supper last night, it was an act of Christian charity for Mistress Stella to invite us to her table. Our sleeping quarters are so damp and chilly that Nicholas' knee began to pain him. He was positively shaking from the cold when she asked us into the mill. As for any impropriety—well, I *am* a vicar. I dine from time to time with most of my parishioners. I should have thought that I proved my integrity at the Trial by Rhyme."

She did not question the Trial. He knew that she only half believed him, but he also knew —and this was not vanity, this was the doubt, the question, the hope in her usually impassive face—that she wanted to believe him.

"Why didn't you ask your benefactress to show you about Dartmoor?"

"To start with, she was sewing a robe for you. She said as long as you had a new apron, you should have a robe to go with it. Then Artor ran off again, Aster ran after him, and Stella has gone to look for both of them. She's afraid that Aster will wander into Dean Church and get into trouble."

"Aster, I should think, could hold her own with a drunken Spaniard. In case you hadn't noticed, she's rather precocious." (Yes, he had noticed. Give her a few more years, and Lord protect the Spaniard.) "Well, we shall leave them to their own devices. Stella has privileges."

"Will you show us about the town and the tors then?"

"First you must have some cowslip tea," she said in a tone between an invitation and a question. She was still uncertain about his intentions. However, as Robin had observed from the time he had been apprenticed to his uncle, the goldsmith, an attractive woman's capacity for self-deception was as deep as Lucifer's fall into Hell.

"But aren't we taking up your time?"

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"I was reading the third chapter in the Book of Redemption. In those days they drowned heretics. So much less satisfactory than burning or crucifixion. Crucifixion has the advantage of giving the sinner time to repent. Burning has the advantage of disposing of the body. But then I know the book by heart anyway, so you weren't interrupting."

They sat on the hard stools. Nicholas struggled to arrange his leg into a comfortable position.

"Perhaps Nicholas could sit on your bed." It was a bold suggestion; it was perhaps a mistake. "He's very neat. He won't muss the quilt."

She looked surprised; then she looked at Nicholas to gauge the degree of his discomfort and the cleanliness of his garments. Stella had washed them while he slept and dried them at her hearth, the tall white stickings, the bulging trousers of cheap serge, the muffling coat and the flat, wide-brimmed hat which he held in his hand.

"Here," she said, drawing him to his feet. "Take off those boots and stretch full length." Carefully she arranged a pillow under his head. Her movements, though stiff and unpracticed, were almost maternal. Robin wondered at the color of her hair beneath the cap which she wore even in her house. It had once been red, but was it still a flame like Stella's or had it fallen to embers or even ashes?

"Nicholas is like a son to me," Robin said. "Do you know, he helped me to write one of my sermons. His Latin is better than mine."

"A knowledge of Latin is mandatory among the Gubbings. This so-called King James Bible is a desecration. The translators were poets, not men of God. To turn a pretty phrase, they thought nothing of perverting God's word. Then, too, there are franknesses in the English which the Latin softens. For that matter, I know Greek too. But Latin suffices. Nicholas, I take it you know your Aeneid? There are presentiments of Christianity in almost every book."

"Yes, Mistress Judith." He promptly quoted from the passage about Aeneas' descent into Hell.

"Splendid. Our Gubbing boys are not so advanced." She hesitated and seemed to grope for words. "Before your trial, it's possible I was a trifle outspoken. One sometimes is, in the service of the Lord. There are so many heretics about. David and Jonathan you called yourselves. Yes, an appropriate comparison."

There were times when Judith looked almost as young as Stella. He was certain that she had never been entirely guileless, not even as a girl. But at least she did not, at this particular moment, look guileful. He was getting a taste of the milk before it had curdled.

Judith kindled a tiny fire on the hearth—she was not one to waste

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faggots—and heated some water for the tea in a pewter kettle. The lark sang a few bedraggled notes and buried his beak among the sunflower seeds.

"Really, he has a lovely voice," she said. "I've taught him several hymns." Splattering a few drops on the reed rug, she poured the tea into earthenware cups and passed them to her guests.

"The kettle," she hurried to explain, "is one which was brought to me by a Gubbing who had just returned from London. We use tin or earthenware locally, of course. Pewter is so—luxurious. But I accepted for fear of hurting his feelings." Robin observed that she had polished the pewter to a high gloss and that her fingers lingered on the warm metal with obvious delight.

Then she said in a conspiratorial whisper. "And would you like some honey in your tea?"

"Very much."

"A wicked luxury, I know. But I have my own hive. The bees came to me of their own accord." She seemed to take pride in having attracted them. "They're such industrious creatures, it wouldn't have done to send them away, would it? I find a lesson in the orderliness of the hive."

"I have a hive in the Vicarage garden. I use honey in my tea, too."

"Do you, Robin?" She spoke his given name for the first time, as if to reward him because they had found a common interest or, so she implied, an uncommon interest.

"And now," she said, dutiful again—well, perhaps half dutiful—"we've delayed long enough over our tea. You asked me to show you around the tors. Is Nicholas up to the walk?" She usually spoke of him in the third person. Puritans expected their children and young people to act like adults, and yet they treated them like children until they married.

But Nicholas answered for himself. "Oh, yes. You'd be surprised how fast I can get around. Stella applied a potion."

"Stella is noted for her potions. There are those who say she used one of a different kind to snare her husband. Personally, I discount the tale. As a girl, she was not uncomely."

They began their tour. The tors by daylight had a fascination, a grotesquerie, almost amounting to beauty. They seemed to be men and beasts or beast-men turned to stone. This one rising into the antlers of a stag, that one seeming to lift its handless arms in supplication. Here a Griffin with wind-pentangled wings, there a Shellycoat, a Bogle, a Merrow. It was, after all, a place of magic, but locked in a sleep so deep and dreamless that even the pipes of Pan would echo uselessly from tor to tor.

The Gubbings had not dug the original mines; the Celts had dug them along with building stone

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forts, now in ruin, and burial cairns. The Gubbings, once they lost their power of flight and migrated here from their eastern forests, had reopened and extended the tunnels and, armed only with picks and wheelbarrows, become unwilling miners. Perhaps it was for their mining that they had received their new name from the missionaires. Skykings burrowing like moles. Grubbing in the earth. He wondered how many of them besides Stella remembered the sky. Judith for one. In her smoky green eyes, there were yearnings as well as angers.

If the Gubbings were barely adequate as miners, they were admittedly inadequate as farmers. You would almost think that they had learned their methods from reading Hesiod's Book of Days. A square of tin attached to a shepherd's staff sufficed them for a hoe. Their scythes—and they were belatedly harvesting the wheat which the farmers of Dean Church had already harvested in their own fields—looked as if they had not been sharpened for at least a hundred years. The only beasts of burden were occasional overburdened mules.

"We find them much superior to other animals."

"How do you mean?"

"For one thing, more reliable. They give their full attention to their work—they are not distracted by, shall we say, the calls of the flesh."

"You meant they don't mate?" asked Nicholas.

"And there, do you see what that man is holding in his hand?"

"A beet, I believe."

"Precisely. Root crops are our special pride. Beets, radishes, carrots, and such. As we say in Dartmoor, 'a Beet a day keeps the Devil away.' "

"I've never seen such a large, firm vegetable," Robin remarked, trying to ignore the worms.

Gray, gray, everything gray, Robin had thought when they began their explorations. But as imperceptibly as the red tendrils of dawn climbing a hill, the countryside and its people began to show glints of color. First a violet lodging among bracken; then a butterfly fluttering like a tiny spray of wheat which had taken flight; and then a girl and boy giggling behind a tor and holding hands until Judith surprised them with a surprisingly indulgent smile.

"Priscilla and James. Haven't you better work for your hands?"

They nodded nervously and picked up their hoes, but Judith whispered to Robin,

"They're affianced to each other. So one may indulge an occasional intimacy. Don't you agree?"

"I certainly do. They'll hoe better for it."

She fell silent and looked as if she might be envisioning intimacies, nuptial no doubt, with him. Unmarried women of thirty,

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he had noticed, rich or poor, English, Spanish, French, and probably Indian, shared a common and unshakable compulsion to wed. He began to long for a return to gray.

"And over there, Judith. May we see that field?" Ostensibly the guided, Robin was actually guiding them toward the borders of Dartmoor. A pointed finger, a question, and Judith was quick to oblige him with answers or demonstrations. They passed farmers and miners. They passed the guards, stern in black and wielding staffs which could batter the brains out of a wolf. But everyone had a smile for Judith—a trifle forced perhaps, a trifle hesitant, but still a smile—and Judith complimented this man's radishes, that man's barrow of tin.

"Joseph, what a sturdy staff. You might have wrestled it from Jacob."

"I hewed it myself from an oak at the edge of the moors. Good for cracking a Papist's skull, eh?"

"Michael, are you true to your Biblical name?"

"No one gets by *me*. I sent a little boy scurrying back to Dean Church just this morning. He took me for a Bogle."

"And that field over there behind the tor?" (In Dartmoor, half an acre passed for a field.) "What do you grow there?" His vision was acute; he could see with perfect clarity that the crop was clover. He also knew that they had come to the edge of Dartmoor.

"Clover for our mules. On the other side there's a waste of bog and fern, and then you come to the farm of a man named Jacob. A good church goer, as you've no doubt observed, but not one of us."

"I had a mule before I came to Dean Church. He died of mysterious causes. An apothecary said I might have mixed some hen bane in the clover I fed him. They often grow together, don't they?"

"Oh, we're careful to keep it weeded out of *our* clover," she said. "Come, let me show you. We prize it next to our beets." There were no more guards between them and the "waste of bog and fern."

Judith fell to her knees and scooped a handful of rich, red earth, which she ran lovingly through her fingers.

"This used to be nothing but a bog. But we trooped out of Dartmoor by night with wheelbarrows and came back with good soil. It must have taken us a month of such trips, and we wore out thirty or more wheels. But isn't it lovely?" She would have made an excellent farmer's wife if she had not been a Judge. There was an earth-love in her. He had to remind himself that there were more hatreds than loves.

When she rose to her feet, he deftly stepped behind her and pinned her in his arms with an inflexible grip, while Nicholas stuff-

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ed her mouth with her own handkerchief and bound her hands and feet with strips of cloth recently torn from one of Stella's coverlits. He felt the surprising smallness of her bones, the bulge of her wings against his chest. At first she was too surprised to struggle. Then she seemed —disillusioned? No, disheartened. The heart had gone out of her. She did not even stiffen her wings against him.

"Judith," he said. "Forgive me. But we can't stay in Dartmoor, Nicholas and I. You must understand that. For better or worse, I'm a vicar and an Anglican and a loyal subject of the King. And Nicholas' parents must be beside themselves with worry over his disappearance." Now she had turned to granite in his arms; mute and cold. "Your guards will find you. Even if they don't you can work yourself free in time."

Nicholas tugged at his arm. "Robin, hurry, or they'll find us!"

Robin deposited her on the ground and rested her head on a pillow of clover. She looked so small and defenseless! Hard, implacable Judith who had meant to crucify him! But he felt no hardness toward her.

He had seen her lark.

"Judith, men have loved you. I'm sure of that." He knelt beside her and kissed her cheek. "They will again. Let them."

"Robin, hurry! Stella will think we've been caught."

"I'm coming, Nicholas."

As he turned to follow his friend, she managed to work the handkerchief out of her mouth.

"Sodomites!" she spat.

He replaced the gag before she could scream for help. "You shouldn't have said that, Judith." But he was glad; she had released him from the burden of pity.

"Let's find Stella."

Stella was waiting for them in the field of the Harvest Home. He opened his arms to her and closed them around a warmth which did not burn, a wonder of sun-warmed roses. Aster and Artor were with her.

"Are we safe?" she whispered.

"Look," he said. "It's the falcon again."

"I think," she said, "that he's trying to warn us."

Book Four: Stella

Chapter XI

EXCEPT FOR Nicholas' leg, they would have headed for Exeter on foot and hoped that they were not overtaken by Gubbings and a wrathful Judith. It was unthinkable to show themselves in the village. People would question Robin and Nicholas. Where had they been for the last three days? Who was this woman with a child and bear, spied briefly at the Harvest Home and now, apparently, a part of the Vicar's questionable retinue? In the end, the whole town would know that they

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had been to Dartmoor. Then, the inevitable conclusion that Stella and her daughter were Gubbings, that the Vicar was, as his enemies had charged, in league with them, and that justice must proceed swiftly to the stake.

But there was Nicholas' leg.

"We'll hide here in the fields till nightfall," said Robin. "Then I'll go to my house and get some pounds and a little food, and borrow two horses from the Blacksmith's stable. He's hard of hearing and won't miss them till morning—of course I'll leave him payment—and we shall ride to Exeter, two to a horse, and make our plans on the way."

Robin glittered with martial fervor. He might have been wearing a plume and cuirass. He might have been a cavalier instead of a vicar; Sir Philip Sidney, poet and warrior, ready to march against Spain. But great warriors are greatly loved; they exact suffering from the women who love them, and Stella suffered for Robin because he had forgotten their danger in the flush of their success. A humble man, he was not used to adventures, flights, escapes. That very morning it was she who had sipped the intoxicating ales of success; it was she who had thought that all the pikes of Dartmoor could not keep them from Exeter. But escape had been too easy. There was still Judith, gargoyle-menacing, behind them.

"Stella, what's the matter? You look as if you had lost your wings."

"I might as well have lost them a long time ago," she said. "I told you they're short and stubby. They wouldn't lift a plump butterfly."

"You know what I mean. You look as if you don't expect to see me again."

"I expect to see you, Robin." She did not say what she feared: in Dartmoor. In the Tabernacle. "But Judith—".

"Even if she's managed to free herself, she's not going to march after us with all her Gubbings, now, is she? Everyone would see them for what they are. They would lose their mystery and terror."

But don't you see, she wanted to cry, they *can* be mysterious, they *can* be terrible. I saw them crucify a woman because she was caught in adultery, and stone the man.

"We don't know what she might do. She isn't a simple person."

"I know," he said with a touch of rue. "But she isn't a demon either. And she doesn't worship the Devil."

"Doesn't she?"

"Not knowingly, anyway. I promise you, Stella, you'll see me again, and with the horses."

"When we start for Exeter, I'll ride behind Robin," said Nicholas before Aster could suggest another arrangement.

"I suppose I'll ride with Mama," said Aster with resigna-

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tion.

Stella had to admit that it was the only sensible plan; dangerous, yes. But then there was no safe plan.

"Come back, Robin," she said, and followed him with her eyes until he was out of sight, and with her ears until his footsteps were no louder than the creeping of an ant.

Huddled among a copse of hawthorne beside the very stream where Robin had swum in the moon, they waited for dusk to overtake the stubbled fields, the low trees, clustering now with small, apple-like fruits. (May Trees, they were sometimes called. That hateful Puritan ship, the *Mayflower*, its captain a Gubbing, had been named for them.)

Fortunately for the hidden, tonight's moon was a thin curved dragonfly and not a bird of fire. No cuckoos sang in the trees along the river bank. Artor, curling his paws beneath his head, had fallen into a blissful sleep and started to dream about honey trees or female bears with tails like puffballs. The stream lay dusky in the deeper dusk of earth. A sudden breeze blew from the direction of Dartmoor. Stella and Aster were fortified against the cold by their body heat, but Nicholas began to shiver as if he had the ague.

Stella, sitting between him and Aster, encircled each of them with a maternal and protective arm. There was a gentle sweetness in holding Nicholas; she felt united with Robin in loving him. She felt the smallness of his bones, the narrowness of his shoulders; not in the least feminine, though; trim and stoutly knit as became his people.

"Here," she said. "I have enough heat for both of us."

"I'm not cold."

"No. I'd forgotten."

"Forgotten what?"

"That you don't get cold like Robin. But you're still shivering."

"My leg hurts a bit."

"It will for some time. But it's getting better. You can walk without your crutches now. Or hadn't you noticed?"

"You're right, I can!" He stood without support; he managed a few limping but resolute steps and remained on his feet. "I'm hungry, aren't you?" They had drunk from the stream, but their only food had been a handful of wild strawberries. "Perhaps I can find some more berries. Or mushrooms. I can tell the poisonous ones. Their bases are swollen cups. I learned that from my father. He uses them in the shop to make ratsbane."

"You'd better stay here," she said and then, thinking that possibly she had embarrassed him by her affectionate arm—seventeen-year old boys did not always like to be hugged by older women—she closed her eyes as if she wished to sleep. He sat beside her and replaced the arm around his shoulder and leaned his head

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against her cap.

"Stella," he said, "your hair feels soft even under that horrible cap. I want Robin to marry you. I didn't at first, even though you had saved our lives. I guess I was jealous. I thought he wouldn't have room for both of us. But he needs you more."

"He needs us both, Nicholas. Remember when I said that the soul lives in a cottage? My own soul has company. Aster joins me in the houseplace and the kitchen. It's only in the bedroom that I'm alone. But till he found you, Robin had nobody in *any* room except his nieces and nephews and friends, who came and went, but never came to stay. The only one who stayed was that disagreeable sounding pig, Caligula. Now he has company in you."

"But not in his solar—that's where he keeps his bed. That's where he needs you."

"I suppose I want too much. I want to be in all his rooms. It's for him to decide, though. If he gives me only the porch, I'll learn to be content."

"Will you?" he asked doubtfully.

Honesty could be a wicked nuisance. Sometimes she wished for Judith's skill at self-deception. "Maybe not content. At least resigned."

"For how long?"

"Between my attempts to move into the solar!"

"And what about *my* cottage?" asked Aster. "Am I to have no company?"

"Be patient, Titmouse. At your age, one shouldn't expect to have every room filled. That's the joy of growing up. Filling room after room."

"I could use some help."

"It's awfully late," said Nicholas. "Do you think something has happened to Robin?"

"I don't know. Our escape from Dartmoor seemed a little too easy. I won't feel safe until —listen! There's someone coming."

The young Roman rescued from human sacrifice by her ancestress could not have been half so surprised by joy.

"It's Robin and he's leading two horses!"

"Quickly now," he cried. "Stella and Aster, this one's name is Piebald. He's old and he won't gallop but he'll get you to Exeter. Let's hope we won't be pursued."

Stella was not a stranger to horses. She had ridden to the hounds with Philip, and it seemed to her wonderfully natural to bestride this large, ungainly, but docile beast named Piebald, with Aster riding pillion behind her. Robin and Nicholas had mounted too—a horse by the name of Essex—and Nicholas had thrown away his crutches.

"I won't need you any more!" he shouted to the hateful wood. Artor, roused from his sleep, shuffled between the two horses. He growled in the fashion of bears

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who like their sleep but, swift as a horse, swifter than these old rusticated horses, he would have no trouble keeping pace with them.

"To Exeter!" cried Robin, who ought to be whispering—they still might arouse the town—but how he stirred her blood! To Exeter! To voyages further than Virginia: To lands unguessed by mere, mundane cartographers! Perhaps, at last, to a cottage with more than a porch! According to the ancients, no man steps twice into the same river from the same bank. For her, it was a different river, but it flowed toward the same sea.

But not for long.

Fingers of bracken clawed at her ankles, hands, face. Sharp, brittle, wounding. Had Piebald stumbled into a pit? No, the fingers were crueller than bracken. They belonged to men.

Piebald was not a Pegasus who could spread his wings and lift her and Aster above their enemies, or a Bucephalus who could snort and paw and thunder to Exeter through swords and pikes. Once they had dragged her from the horse, they stood back from her in a circle, like bullies whose numbers gave them superiority but not courage, and she saw their faces in the thin light of the moon.

"Bind their hands," someone was saying. She would have expected Judith. But there were no women in this land of sleepy-eyed farmers from Dean Church, who looked distinctly unmenacing and uncomfortable at having to apprehend their vicar, even if he was in the company of a dubious woman and guiltily fleeing from his own parish.

But they were more than menaced, they were captured; Nicholas' father was leading the captors. Somehow, Judith had sent or brought him word of the escape. He had gathered a band of farmers; waited for Robin in the town; followed him to the hiding place of his friends; and apprehended them once they had mounted their horses.

He was carrying a pike, a curious weapon for an apothecary, but not unbecoming to his lordly stance, his air of being about the Lord's business.

Robin, who knocked down three men before being knocked to his knees and bound with the leather thongs which the farmers used on their sheep, glared up at his captors—his particular captor—and boomed in the voice he used on a sleepy congregation.

"Has the devil possessed you, Standish? I'm taking your son to Exeter to find a physician. His leg has worsened and—"

For answer, the Apothecary drove his pike into Artor's heart.

THE DRAGONFLY MOON sank below the horizon. Dawn ruddied the sky. Cocks began to crow; a simple, homely sound that moved her to tears because it was with just such homely things—an old

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mill, a trundle bed, a garden where hollyhocks grew among the beets—that she had filled her life since Philip's death and made a series of little magics between the large sadnesses, the dreads and the angers. All night she had lain on her side, hands and feet bound behind her, wakeful and waiting. She did not know the place; she only knew that she lay atop a hill, with a farmer standing guard above her; she could hear Robin, Nicholas, and Aster breathing on the same hill, but at some distance from her. Not so far, though, that she could not distinguish between their breaths, Robin's deep and long; Nicholas' light and sporadic—if he slept he dreamed bad dreams. Only Aster appeared to be sleeping with the innocence and, thank Picus, the ignorance of a child.

Once, in that interminable time between the death of the moon and the birth of dawn, she called a name:

"Robin!"

"Stella, I'm here."

"Hush, Mistress. You are not to speak to him."

"Where are we?" she asked her guard.

"On the Hill."

"Which hill?"

"The Hill of Stakes."

"Where you burn witches?"

"Yes."

"Have you burnt many here?"

"One last year. Two in '28. That's all." He stood behind her and she could not see him, but her ears had already told her that he was young and reluctant.

"Will you light the fires?"

"Oh, no, Mistress Stella." He had heard Robin speak her name.

"Will you watch?"

"Yes. Hush now. They're bringing the stakes."

Trussed like a calf for branding, she could not turn her head to watch the climbers. To judge from the sound, there must be twenty or more men and some of them seemed to be carrying heavy objects; they gasped and paused from time to time and resumed their climb. Soon she heard them digging around their bases. At first she wished that her ears had been as dull as her nostrils; no, she was not an ostrich. Better to hear the preparations, shovel and hammer and shovel, than to lie in silence, looking at the earth and imagining horrors more horrible than the truth.

The young guard severed her thongs with a knife which looked as if it were made for whittling toys and lifted her to her feet. His hands jerked and trembled; perhaps he was afraid to touch her. He was a farmer, to judge from his tunic, his low boots, and the leather lacings around his calves.

Her feet felt dead; at first they could not support her weight. "Please," she said. "The blood has left my feet."He averted his eyes when she looked at him (he thinks I will give him the evil eye). He was not a Puritan, certainly not a

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Gubbing. His hair was as black and unkempt as a crow from a haystack. His red countenance was open, potentially blithe, not unintelligent. She liked him.

"No," she said. "I think I can stand."

He gave her his hand. "Are you—?"

"A witch? No more than your sweetheart or mother."

He shook his head. "Master Standish says—" But at least she caught his eye.

"You're crying," he said. "Witches can't cry." He dropped her hand and clambered down the hill.

She felt a surprising loss with his going; she who had so much more to lose. At least she had time to study the place of her death. The light of early morning was preter-naturally clear, or perhaps desperation sharpened her senses. In Dean Church, there was neither a town square nor a village green. Witches were burned on a hill which overlooked the town. Below, the quiet stone cottages with their vines and roses were chattering into life. The flutter of sparrows under the eaves (a female has broken her wing); the cry of a child (not hurt—he wants attention); the bark of an old sheep dog (rheumatism has settled in his legs). She could see much; she could hear everything. Probably Robin could smell the breads and puddings, the hogsback and bacon of breakfast.

Here, the wind-swept hill, devoid of trees, sparse of grass, thrust its stakes into the sky like slender living pines. The hill should be proud. At last it had grown a semblance of a tree. Robin, Nicholas, and Aster, each under guard, stood widely separated and at some distance from her.

The young farmer, of course, had not left her unguarded. There were perhaps a dozen men on the hill, and they ranged in mood from frightened to frightening: a timorous shepherd who looked as if he might mistake a scarecrow's shadow for a devil. Scobble and Scobble's father, identical except that the father was as brown and wrinkled as a maple leaf in fall; identical in their slow, shuffling gait and in their faces, which were capable of two expressions; cupidity and stupidity.

"Why is my child here?" she called to Scobble's father. "Children aren't burned. Even convicted witches are usually hanged before they are burned."

He blinked and stared at her. "Burn them here in Dean Church, we do. Too much waste to build a gallows first." He fingered the wart on the lobe of his left ear. "For the girl, it's drowning, though." He pointed to a stream which ran prettily beside the hill, between willows, among reeds; deep in places; translucent like the fins of an angel fish. "She can see the burning first."

"She isn't a witch. She—" A sudden slap caught her across the

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mouth. It was not Scobble's father, who lacked the courage to strike a witch. It was Michael Standish.

He spoke loudly enough for everyone on the hill to hear him. "It is universally acknowledged that the daughter of a witch becomes a witch." Then, in a whisper audible only to the ears of a Gubbing, "The daughter of a traitress becomes a traitress." She understood his loathing for her and Aster. She had fled to Exeter and, in spite of her return, continued to walk in that subtle aura of freedom which was like a wind from the Channel, salt-fresh, invigorating, intoxicating. He had journeyed to London and found a city to hate and condemn, a modern Sodom which the Lord had spared for reasons to be found not even in the Book of Redemption. Its bishops and courtiers? A band of Satyrs for whom an eternity in Hell was insufficient punishment. Its King? A weakling and, worse, a Papist in disquise.

Stella had always known that he was a Gubbing; she had known him when she was a little girl and he and his wife had left for London "on God's work." She had known Nicholas, too, as a baby in Dartmoor, orphaned by the Plague and placed with the Standishes when they returned from London to Dean Church (and surreptitiously, when they could, to Dartmoor) and introduced as their son. The Gubbings lost no chance to place orphans with their own people who were infiltrating the towns and cities of England and the colonies of the New World. In a few instances, the placing had been detected and the child, stripped, examined, exposed with wings or feathers, was taken to be a changeling and drowned in the nearest stream. In Nicholas' case, the Standishes had arrived in Dean Church with him and no one had guessed that they were not his true parents. Since he was one of those rare Gubbings who possessed no rudiments of wings or feathers, he had not been told the truth; children talk; he might have told his schoolmates. As a youth he was sent to be trained in the ministry at Emmanuel College, the Puritan stronghold at Cambridge. At a suitable time—if he had betrayed Robin, for example, and after completing his studies—he would have been told about his origins, taken to Dartmoor for instruction—and instructions—and sent into the unenlightened world as yet another Puritan to teach that God was duty, not love, and duty lay in burning witches (unless they were faithful Gubbings) and conspiring against King Charles, his worldly courtiers, and his ritualistic bishops.

Stella had hesitated to tell Nicholas that he was a Gubbing. The boy lacked confidence. A few days with Robin had already lessened his sense of sin, but to learn that he was one of those same beings who had almost

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crucified him and his friend might have crippled him more than the hooves of that ramping horse in Cambridge.

She had meant to tell Robin. He would have forgiven the boy; no, forgiveness implied judgment, and Robin accepted and did not judge Nicholas. But she and Robin, when they had not been with Aster and Nicholas, had talked about marriage, and the subject had proved not only explosive but exclusive: like talk of the winds and the sea on a tempest-threatened ship, or talk of fire in a burning town.

Now Nicholas' foster father was coolly preparing to execute him. The boy had failed him as a spy, as a Puritan, as a Gubbing; he was weak, he was sinful, and he had been to Dartmoor for the wrong reasons. He must be destroyed, if not as a warlock, then as a witch's minion. Stella would carry him with her to her own death, along with Robin and Aster.

Except for Mistress Standish and the young farmer who had guarded her through the night, the entire populace of Dean Church, it seemed, had come to watch the burnings. There must have been three hundred people who climbed the hill—parents carrying babies, children scrambling ahead of their parents. It might have been a holiday, it might have been a hanging. It was hard to tell from that wall of grinning, ghoulish faces.

Humans, she thought, with infinite revulsion; with the ancient lordly prejudice of her people when they had flown in the clouds and built their homes in the trees and literally looked down on human men and women. She was a Skyking; she was a sky queen. And yet these humans had dared to humble and humiliate her, Stella, whose ancestors had been worshipped as gods, celebrated as kings; whose ancestress had graced the Book of Rejoicing.

Humans.

But Robin was a human. Furthermore, what her people had become was surely lower than what these people had been born. As they reached the top of the hill she saw that they were not, after all, indistinguishable. Indeed, there were ghouls, who feasted with their eyes if not their lips. That youth with the hump on his back: had his deformity withered his compassion? His mouth was agape with a drooling grin. And the curiosity-seekers, heartless if not quite murderous. That woman with the straw-colored bonnet. Chirping to her neighbor as if she had entered some tarts in a county fair and come to watch the tasting. But by and large she saw in the faces not so much cruelty, nor even curiosity, as fear; not so much the will to wound as the wish to be guarded against diabolical spells. They were afraid of her. A witch. A Satanist. They did not really want to torture or punish her. They wanted to free

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themselves from her threat in a fashion which, they supposed, would also dispose of her ghost and free them from future hauntings. The soul of a witch who was hanged might haunt the countryside for a hundred years. The soul of a witch who was burned was thought to sink immediately into Hell.

She understood them but she did not forgive them. She was not a simpering Christian to turn the other cheek (but then, what Christian truly practiced his creed?). She was a Skyking. "Lose your talons, strike with your beak!" Thus, the Book of Rejoicing. They were going to drown her daughter. They were going to burn her friends. Their deeds if not their souls were cruel. Most of the world's harm, it seemed, was done by ignorant, essentially decent men. The Spanish Inquisitors had burned a heretic and gone to church or played on the green with their children.

Picus, let them get on with their unintentional evil, their deadly decency! Or give me the evil eye that they fear and let me strike them blind! At least you can say for the Gubbings that they farm badly, mine with indifference, but crucify with a skill approaching art.

She was strangely pleased to see that Nicholas' foster-mother had not come to the burning. Probably she was the only inhabitant of Dean Church to remain in her home. Judith had come, of course. Judith was bound to come. She had lifted her cape as if to protect her face on that brisk and windy morning. She looked like an upright shadow, and no more threatening. A traveler from a neighboring town? Somebody's aunt or cousin from London? What did it matter? Burnings, even if sudden, always attracted strangers. No one would question her.

Judith looked into her eyes and smiled: You went to Exeter and see where it led. . . .

Stella did not envy her; she did not even hate hre: I took the road to Exeter. Twice. Shall I protest that this time I did not reach the sea? It is journeys and not destinations which have made me rich. My innocent child must die in pain, but she has lived for nine years in my love. To save her life, I would wish her not my child. But I would not wish her yours.

There had not as yet been a trial. Even in this, the cruelest era of witch-burning England had ever known, witches were never burned without a trial. Little Dean Church could boast neither judge nor mayor, and no one had taken time to invite magistrates from Exeter. But Michael Standish, it seemed, intended to follow the King's law. He himself would enact the role of judge, and the townspeople would be his jurors.

The stakes had been raised, the faggots heaped to resemble hayricks; but there were doubts in

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the minds of the people. Downcast eyes, a furtive blink, doubt and perplexity. They were not a compassionate folk, they were not an intelligent folk; but by and large they did not wish to burn their vicar and a boy from their own village unless there was irrefutable proof of their guilt. Stella and Aster were strangers to them; curiosities. But Robin had preached in their own church. They had fallen asleep in his sermons. Some of them had accused him of demonic practices. But girls had loved him, boys had imitated him, mothers had baked him pies. Coming from London, a poet, a man of learning before he was a man of God, he had been resented. He had also been respected; by some, adored. Michael Standish, august and judicial, was not at this moment a popular man.

He must have anticipated resistance. He must have known that the only powers he possessed were those which were lent to him by superstition and hysteria. He had presumed to lead the townfolk of Dean Church and till now they had followed him, even to the Hill of Burnings. But presumption could lead to a fall. Now he was a judge; if he managed to condemn Stella and her friends, he would become a kind of hero; disliked but still heroic. If he failed to condemn her he would be, what he had been, a rich apothecary, but also less than he had been, reviled instead of respected.

She watched him watching the crowd and assessing their mood; judging the precise moment to make his accusation. She shivered but not with the cold. The prettily winding river caught the glint of the sun and held her eye . . . images crowded and chilled her brain . . . Philip's beloved Shakespeare . . . doubting Hamlet . . . doomed Ophelia . . .

(There is a willow grows askant the brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream,
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make. . . .)

He raised his hands. Armored in righteous arrogance, he managed to silence even that motley and divided group.

"You will wonder," he said, "why I have summoned you here. I am not a judge. I am not a messenger of the king or an official servant of the Church. I have no authority but that which is granted to all God-fearing men by the Deity, who may work for good through the humblest of his subjects." (Humility did not become him; his listeners had not come to hear a sermon. He hastened to more dramatic pronouncements.) "I have called you here to judge a woman I believe to be a witch. A child who must share her mother's guilt. Our Vicar, Robert Herrick, who was apprehended with them on the

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road to Exeter." He faltered and momentarily seemed to lose his voice; he brushed an invisible tear from his cheek. "And my own misguided son." There was no visible response from the crowd. He held their attention but he had not won their sympathy. He was still a parishioner condemning his vicar and a father condemning his son. "Perhaps I am mistaken; I hope that I am mistaken. But if I am right, I need hardly tell you the consequences if the woman is freed. There is witchcraft practiced in Dartmoor, of that we can have no doubt. Mysterious lights. Disappearances. Deaths. Shall we return a witch to her coven? Allow me to quote from a sermon preached to Queen Elizabeth by one of her most respected bishops." (Elizabeth, dead for twenty-seven years, was a demon to Gubbings but a saint to Anglicans.)

May it please your Grace to understand that witches and Sorcerers within these few years are marvelously increased within your Grace's realm. Your Grace's subjects pine away even unto the death; their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft. . . .

Rotting flesh, fading cheeks —cruelty familiar to anyone who had lost a child or spouse to the Plague.

"Is this woman guilty of such atrocities?" It was the Miller's wife. Doubtless Standish had asked her to ask the question. As carefully as the ministers of Queen Elizabeth had arranged a masque or a progress, he had calculated a performance extending from the capture on the road to Exeter through the burning of his captives, and he must not seem to be the sole performer.

He crossed the hill; he paused in front of Stella and turned on her a look which both accused and besought; that of a saint exhorting a sinner to repent. Then he addressed her in a measured, mesmerizing voice, the voice which men use to tame wild animals, or to win crowds who are more sincere than intelligent.

"You have heard my charge. What have you to say in your own defense, Mistress Stella?"

She wanted to spit in his eye, but it would hardly help her defense.

"If a witch is a woman who serves the devil, I am innocent. If she performs spells, rots flesh, benumbs speech—I am innocent. And even if I were guilty, my daughter and my friends—"

With the swiftness of a viper —and how the old Skykings had hated the vipers which had threatened their eggs!—his hand leaped to her head, bared her of cap and hood, and liberated her hair, that tumult richer than roses, too crimson to be angelic. She knew for the first time what men had told her—Philip, Robin,

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and others—that she was more than comely, that she was beautiful in the high, legendary sense of Helen, who had destroyed a city, and Deirdre, whom love had destroyed. Here on this little hill, this mockery of a Troy, she was still her own legend. The men desired her and the women envied her. Thus had Standish worked her destruction. Great beauty was either worshipped or defiled. Men would murder what they desired and could not possess. Women would murder what they envied and could not attain.

"She must be a witch," cried Corinna. "Why, look at that hair! The Devil gave it those fires."

It was Robin who answered her; it was Robin whom Standish allowed to answer her. The subtlety with which he controlled the trial was evident to Stella, his countrywoman, but to the crowd it must have seemed that he was acting the part of the fair-minded judge; hearing all possible argument; reserving judgment.

Robin's voice was hot with controlled anger. The lavas were held in check, but the least crack and a mountain would burst into fire.

"King James has decreed and King Charles had confirmed witches shall die for necromancy, laming, wasting men's bodies or goods, and harboring familiar spirits. Furthermore, judges shall not condemn on hearsay. At Leicester, nine people were condemned on the word of a small boy who was subject to fits. James himself intervened and freed the accused. What is your proof against Mistress Stella?"

"That bear of hers—a familiar, I'll warrant."

"He's dead. Standish killed him with one thrust of his pike. A familiar you say?"

" 'Tisn't hearsay my cow sickened the night of the Harvest Home and died next day. Healthiest animal in the barn!"

"Three of my hens died the same night."

"A horse ran down my dog."

It was Standish himself who answered the indignant farmers. "Our Vicar is right. There are intimations of guilt, but as yet no proof. Least of all the woman's beauty. Beauty alone does not betoken a witch. Consider Ruth and Esther, Rebecca and even Rahab, the harlot. Yet each in her own way followed God's path."

Having exposed her as beautiful and therefore suspect, he had surprisingly defended her. He had silenced the crowd in its outcries. Thus, when he made his final and fatal charge, he would seem to have been an impartial judge who had deliberated in his own conscience, resisting the haste of the crowd; seeking excuses for the woman until the disclosure of that which was inexcusable.

"But there is, after all, further evidence. Irrefutable evidence." He lifted her hair and rested his hand on the back of her neck. A viper, she thought. Cold, in spite

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of his body heat; stained and seamed from the powders he mixes, the roots he digs in his herbarium. If he does not take it away—

He removed his hand. He also removed the back of her gown and petticoat in one rending jerk. Thus, swiftly, simply, and irrevocably, he exposed her to the waist. He exposed her as a witch.

"Crimson like her hair. Is it part of her petticoat?"

"Petticoat! It's wings. The woman has wings!"

"Like a griffin."

"No. Like a phoenix!"

Before they have finished with me, I will welcome the flames, she thought. The English are kinder to witches than the Swiss or the French. As a rule they hang them before they burn them, but out of kindness, not cruelty, and they do not flay them or lop off their ears and fingers. But these Englishmen have seen my wings, which are ugly and stunted like my people. And Robin has seen them, Robin who thought them tall like flames, the wings of a queen. I know how Lucifer felt when he fell from heaven.

The sound of their voices came to her as if from the uppermost branches of a tall oak tree: muffled, distant, distorted. Perhaps she dreamed them. Surely she dreamed them.

"But her wings are unfolding like flames! How did she hide them under her gown?"

"They're slender, you see. Tapering and delicate. The bodice pressed them against her back."

"Can she fly, do you think?"

"She doesn't need to fly. It's enough to look like Lilith. If she flew, she would be an angel."

"Is she evil then?"

"Yes. But men could die for her."

"That is her evil."

She remembered lines from the Book of Rejoicing: "And her love was so great that her wings stood tall like flames. . . ."

"Tall like flames" . . . It was true then. It was also true that she stood condemned.

In the almost-hush of her beauty, she spoke to the crowd:

"You have seen my wings. If they make me a witch, then he"—she pointed at Michael Standish—"and he"—at the Miller—"and he"—at the Blacksmith—"and she"—at the Seamstress—"must share in my guilt. They are my own people. Winged like me. Strip them and see for yourselves."

For one tenuous moment, for one drip of a water clock, it seemed that the crowd would listen to her. The Miller, the Seamstress, the Blacksmith—they looked as if she had lashed them in the face with a myrtle rod. Indeed, she had lashed them with fear. They could not have known that Michael Standish, at incalculable risk, would reveal her wings and give her the chance to make her own accusations.

But Standish answered her with

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the unanswerable argument: laughter. He, the dour Puritan apothecary, threw back his head and laughed like a jovial cavalier. "A warlock. She calls me a warlock. Shall I strip for you here on this hill? Do you want to see the naked limbs of your apothecary? White, skinny, hairless. Wings, did she say? Anna, who sews your aprons—a *witch*! Good Master Thomas, your blacksmith, a *warlock*! Perhaps he charms your horses into losing their shoes to increase his business."

"She'll have us all witches!" It was the Seamstress.

"Or warlocks." It was Scobble.

Michael Standish had hurled his deadliest pike. It had struck in her heart because the people of Dean Church did not want to believe that their town had been infiltrated by a band of winged Satanists. It was one thing to burn a witch and her two minions and drown her daughter and then return to their fields and their looms. But the Miller, the Seamstress, the Blacksmith, even the Apothecary. Must the hill be forested with stakes? And so they howled in a frenzy of merriment, and she shut her eyes and wished for once that she could close her ears.

In the cloudless sky, a great white falcon wheeled in diminishing arcs.

They hurried her toward the stake. Pulled, prodded, dragged by the hand (but no one touched her wings). She might have been a great queen taken in adultery.

She stood almost as tall as the stake (frugal, these farmers. Why should they waste their wood?). She felt the faggots thrust against her ankles, her legs, her breast. They should have been placed in a carefully measured circle around her, waist-high, without quite touching her. The victim was meant to suffocate from the smoke before she was burned to death. But they piled the branches as high as her neck and pressed them cruelly into her skin. They wanted to hide her wings. They were still afraid of her.

Clumsy murderers, they cannot even burn me without their perpetual bumbling clumsiness. Picus, let them be gentle with Aster when they drown her!

(. . . . . Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress.)

It would be a kindness to suffocate her while she slept. I have heard of such kindnesses even among humans. If someone could only hear me! If I could speak above this babble of threats, exorcisms, jeers!

Strange, this God of the Christians, at least what his worshippers do in his name. In place of joy, this—

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"I want to light his fire." Scobble advanced upon Robin with swaggering steps while his father watched with paternal pride. "He beat me up in the fields. Some of you saw him. Now we know what he is."

"Look," cried Corinna, pointing to the sky. "Is it an eagle?"

"Big enough to be. But no. The hooked, notched bill—And he doesn't soar; his wings beat all the time."

"And the white feathers—a gyrfalcon."

"Too far south."

"Storms blow them down."

"But the size of the fellow. Never seen one so large!"

"Now you have!"

The bird descended in rapid, lessening arcs. Sunlight glittered yellowly in his eyes. She could hear his wingbeats, rhythmic and unhurried. As if he had sighted his prey and judged him to be entrapped. A rabbit in a field without a warren. A serpent asleep in the sun. Scobble stared at him until the resin began to run down his arm.

Michael Standish took the torch from his hand. "The woman should be the first to burn, my son." Mosaic, omnipotent, he gestured toward the bird as if he were bidding the waters of the Red Sea to part. "God sent doves to signal the end of the flood. Now he has sent a falcon to witness the burning of a woman with wings. What creature could be more fitting?"

The bird seemed almost bodiless when he dove; almost invisible; a mist of sunlight and cloud and feathers. The awesomeness, the awfulness had momentarily gone from him. But when he struck he was a hardness of rock and bronze, talons to rend, a beak to tear, and a wingspread as wide as Nicholas with outstretched arms!

Standish dropped the torch and threw up his hands to protect his face. He forgot to protect his back.

His cape, his shirt, his undergarment of brown sackcloth—had they too dissolved in the sun? Torn from his back in a single beat of those wings, they slid to the ground behind him like a dying fox. There were no wings to billow from his own shoulders, no wonder of leaping flame, but his back was aflame with russet feathers, a miracle of glittering plumage. It seemed at first yet another garment, a finely woven fabric of softest silk. But the merciless, merciful sun distinguished the individual feathers of a Gubbing.

He did not try to hide his nakedness. He faced the crowd with the arrogant dignity of an angel prepared to fall for the second time.

(A tall shadow flickered down the hill.)

Book Five: Aster

Chapter XII

ASTER LOVED WEDDINGS. She

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had always known that, having missed the first, she would love her mother's second wedding. But who would have thought that anyone *thirty* could have looked like a handmaiden to the Lark Goddess? Mama's hair was drawn into a loose knot behind her head, but crimson ringlets fell like rose petals over her bare shoulders. Her cloak of white velvet, held by an emerald clasp, rippled like wind-stirred foliage above her gown of pale green satin and above her slippers which peeped from the hem like snails and led Robin to compose a verse with the speed of Mother Goose (or perhaps to quote a verse which he had already composed):

Her pretty feet
Like snails did creep
A little out, and then,
As if they started at Bo-Peep,
Did soon draw in again.

At her throat, a malachite pendant hung in the shape of a soaring Pegasus, and at her back her wings extended like tapering flames whose tips brushed the rushes on the floor.

Robin, though he had not lost his ability to compose, lost his composure at the start of the ceremony. Aster was not surprised. The poor man had suffered unspeakable dangers, unmentionable indignities, the past week. That terrible morning on the hill, when those dirty, rough-handed farmers had meant to burn him and dear Mama and Nicholas, and drown *her*, but ended by burning the Apothecary, the Seamstress, the Blacksmith, the Miller and his beet-faced wife, Scobble and father, and at least a dozen other disguised Gubbings (and later, she was told, they had drowned three children in the same stream where she herself was supposed to end). When the falcon had plummeted out of the sky like a warrior of Picus and ripped the Apothecary's shirt and bared his plumage, you would have thought that the Spaniards had landed a second Armada. Shouts. Accusations. Protestations. Scufflings on the ground. Some of the people had started to run from the hill, but others had overtaken and undressed them right down to their stockings. Some had wings, some had plumage like the Apothecary; some, bare-backed and black of hair, and therefore presumed innocent, were allowed to reclaim their clothes, or what was left of them, and undress their neighbors. In order to avoid the indignity of ripped clothes and searching hands, many had undressed themselves—that shameless Corinna had pranced over the hill with breasts aquiver like Christmas puddings tipped with cherries—and you would have thought that they were planning an orgy around a Maypole. In less than an hour the hill was forested with stakes and there was a forest fire which Aster had mercifully

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been spared; a farmwife had taken her into the village; but Michael Standish was said to have made the biggest blaze and never once had he lost his Moses look.

Hardly had the flames fallen to ashes than the able bodied men and boys of Dean Church seized their shepherd staffs and hammers and matchlocks and marched on Dartmoor, through the bracken, around the pits, into the village, into the Tabernacle. But there was no one anywhere in the town. There was food on some of the tables, there were fires on some of the hearths. But Judith had fled with all of her people to spread their mischief throughout the land. Perhaps they would find a ship and sail to Plymouth or found a new colony and shame the Indians out of their loin cloths and into trousers. At least they would no longer wander Dartmoor at night with lanterns like Will-o-the-Wisps, and eat horses, and crucify men and women near Dean Church.

That Mama and Nicholas had not been burned and that she herself had not been drowned was a sheer miracle, said Nicholas. No, said Robin. It was belated justice. The townfolk had understood that they were trying to escape from their own people, that they were renouncing them and their harsh, loveless, perverted ways. She and Mama were adjudged repentant and therefore redeemed witches, and Nicholas, a repentant and redeemed warlock, and Robin was commended for having helped them in their escape.

There had followed a long consultation between Robin and the town elders—those who had not been burned—and the elders had decided first of all that it was unwise to alarm the bishop at Exeter with tales which he might not believe, and wise to spread the word that the Plague had made a sudden visit to Dean Church. Second, that Robin could keep his parish. However, it was unthinkable for him to marry Mama. She could hide her "sinfully beautiful" hair under a bonnet, wear unpretentious clothes, become his servant, and live with Aster and Nicholas in his gatehouse. Every vicar needed a servant. Robin's vicarage could do with some cleaning, what with that disreputable pig about the place, and he could also use a cook. Mama was forgiven and accepted, Robin was rewarded by an increase in salary from twenty-eight to thirty pounds a year, but a vicar and a Gubbing, even a redeemed Gubbing, simply could not marry and remain in Dean Church. Furthermore, Mama would have to change her name. Corinna's father suggested "Prudence Baldwin" after an aunt who had died a presumed virgin at the age of ninety-three. "It smacks of virtue. It ought to keep her redeemed."

"If I can't marry her here, we'll go away and be married," Robin had told the elders (or so he had

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told Mama).

"But where else will you be safe?" they had argued. "There are no more Gubbings around Dean Church. But from what you say, there may be Gubbings everywhere else in the country, and even in Virginia and Massachusetts. It's keep your parish and safety, or go wandering and probably be crucified along with your woman and her little girl and poor fatherless Nicholas." (Nicholas' foster mother had escaped from Dean Church before the burnings and become, so Aster had later heard, a harlot in Exeter like Mama's old friend. Harlotry sounded like a stimulating, if insecure, profession. She understood that it was rather like being the Whore of Babylon.)

Robin had repeated his talk with the elders to Mama, who had said at once, "But of course you must stay in Dean Church. The people are just starting to appreciate you. They'll listen to your sermons now, even if you quote Catullus."

"You really think so, Stella?"

"Of course I do, my dear. 'Prudence Baldwin' will suit me very well for a name. And you know how I love to cook. You're sure your parishioners won't talk, though, about my living in the gate-house?"

"Oh, some of the women will gossip a bit. But everybody knows the circumstances. And now that the Gubbings are gone, these country folk are a pretty realistic bunch. When you grow up with cows and pigs and chickens, you know that people, even vicars, sometimes have to make—er—arrangements. For the sake of appearances, you can keep your things in the gate-house, but of course you'll sleep in my trundle bed. And not in the trundle. Furthermore, we can slip off from time to time to the mill. Even a vicar has his holidays."

"What about Caligula?"

"He can sleep in the gate-house."

"And we can have our own private arrangements, can't we, Robin, our own private ceremony in the mill and *really* be married in the eyes of Picus and the Lark Goddess and Mother Goose."

THE MILL was rainbowed with flowers—those little mothlike daisies that grew among the bracken, hollyhocks from Stella's garden and roses from the Vicarage, and especially sunflowers, heaped on the table with the mince pies and the mulled cider and scattered over the floor along with the rushes. It was a private ceremony. Weddings among the old Skykings had always been private, with no one invited except the family and closest friends. Robin had wanted to invite his nieces and nephews. Aster heard him mutter something to Nicholas about "safety in numbers," whatever that meant. But he had decided that there were far too many of them to get in the mill.

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"Nicholas," he had said, "if I invite one, I'll have to invite all of them, and their mothers and fathers too. So I'm not going to invite anybody but you. But you can ask your best friend, if you like."

"But that's you," said Nicholas.

"Second best?"

"George."

George rode from Cambridge on a snorting black stallion whose hoofbeats sounded like thunder and whose mane was as black as a thunder-cloud. It was Aster who held the reins and helped him to dismount (not that he needed help; it seemed a courtesy, though, to give him her hand.) Of course he was even older than Nicholas, but Pegasus, what a man! A cavalier, that's what he was. She had never seen such golden hair except on Robin, but George's hair was fashionably combed and curled and, she supposed, lamenting her undeveloped nostrils, perfumed with exotic pomades from the Indies. He wore earrings of hammered gold—what would Judith have thought?—and a lace-edged collar and a scarlet coat with lavendar braids, and boots of jacked leather, and *two* pairs of stockings. And he seemed to fancy her! He called her "my little Titmouse" and he patted her on the head and promised to bring her a pomander bracelet from London, and it seemed to her that he was saying in his gentlemanly way, "None of the London girls can hold a feather to you! I don't mind the wait."

She did not want to disappoint Nicholas; truly he was a good and loyal friend. But you had to choose a husband who could, as her mother had said, fill all the rooms of your cottage. Nicholas would understand. At the proper time, she would help him to find his own bride. One of those rustic girls, perhaps, nimble at the loom and quick in the kitchen.

The ceremony was brief and simple. Mama and Robin joined hands and read together from the Book of Rejoicing.

Let acorns cornucopia-heap our table, let the clouds through which we frolic never resound with thunder or crackle with lightnings. Let us live as blissfully as turtle doves in an apple tree. In the name of Picus and the Lady of the Larks, of Mother Goose, Pegasus, and all the lesser saints, we are joined together in blissful matrimony, to disport ourselves in amorous dalliance among the treetops and to grace our nest with cinnamon-speckled eggs. . . .

After the ceremony, Mama began to cry. Robin did his best to comfort her, though he ended with Nicholas having to comfort *him*. Men were always embarrassed by a woman's tears.

"I'm crying for joy," Mama insisted. "The wedding, the excitement. Let me catch my breath on the porch. Then I'll be ready for a

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hogshead of ale." Aster was worried, though. It was rare for Mama to cry, whatever the reason. She peeped onto the porch through a crack in the door.

Extraordinary! There was that same white falcon, perched on the railing as if he owned the mill and big enough to defend his claim. Mama had a way with birds and animals. In fact, she was talking to him.

"Is it all right, Philip? Truly?" She must have named him for Aster's father.

Philip flapped his wings and rose thunderously into the sky, circled twice and dipped his head like a sailor greeting a fine London lady, and disappeared into clouds less white than his own foamy feathers.

"Mama," Aster screamed. "No, no!" For Mama was climbing onto the rail and, horror of horrors, spreading her wings and *stepping into space.*

It was twelve feet to the ground.

Aster ran to the rail, Nicholas and George behind her, and stared at the ground, expecting to see her mother nursing a broken leg or a sprained ankle.

But Mama was smiling among her hollyhocks at least an apple's throw from the mill.

"Mama, you flew!"

"No, Titmouse. Glided, that's all. Just give me time."

But where was the bridegroom? Not on the porch with her and Nicholas and George—not in the houseplace—she would have heard him. There, there, running out of the mill and stumbling through the hollyhocks and into Mama's arms!

Aster began to cry.

"What's the matter, Titmouse?" George asked. "Your mother looks fine to me."

Men, bless them, never understood these things. She always cried at weddings.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wish to express a deep indebtedness to Marjorie Quennell's A History of Everyday Things in England*–both its vivid text and its expert drawings. For the flavor of the early Seventeenth Century I am much indebted to that inimitable novelist, Norah Lofts, and her* Bless This House. *And for the facts of Robert Herrick's life and the folklore of Devon or Devonshire, the county in which he preached, I borrowed often and gratefully from Marchette Chute's* Two Gentle Men.

All of the poems attributed to Herrick are indeed by him, even the uncharacteristic piece quoted, piece meal, in my chapter on the Trial by Rhyme. As for the other characters in the story, Aster, Nicholas, and Stella are invented, but there was a "Prudence Baldwin" who served as Herrick's maid and is generally thought to have warmed his bed as well as his kitchen. When Cromwell came to

(Cont. on page 120)

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L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

SUPERMAN IN A DERBY

IN 1922, a great heroic fantasy, *The Worm Ouroboros*, was published in a small collector's edition by R. & R. Clark of Edinburgh. When it made no splash, a cheaper edition was issued in 1924 by Jonathan Cape, Ltd., of London. This likewise had little impact, but two years later it begat an American edition by E. P. Dutton & Co., with an introduction by James Stephens, author of the immortal *Crock of Gold*.

For the next quarter-century, *The Worm Ouroboros* remained the private enthusiasm of a small circle of connoisseurs, including James Branch Cabell. When I was a fledgling writer, Fretcher Pratt introduced me to *The Worm*. This extraordinary novel failed, on first publication, to make a bigger impression because it belonged to a genre that never became popular until the 1960s, when Tolkien and Howard became best-sellers in paperback. The first printing of *The Worm* was forty-odd years ahead of its time.

The Worm Ouroboros begins with an "Induction":

There was a man named Lessingham dwelt in an old low house in Wastdale, set in a gray old garden where yew-trees flourished that had seen Vikings in Copeland in their seedling time. Lily and rose and larkspur bloomed in the borders, and begonias with blossoms big as saucers, red and white and pink and lemon-colour, in the beds before the porch. . . .[1]

We meet Lessingham smoking his after-dinner cigar. He speaks to his wife, goes to bed, and dreams—or is it a dream?—that he flies in a chariot drawn by a hippogriff to the planet Mercury.

This Mercury is nothing like the astronomers'. Instead, it is a version of our own earth, with oceans, continents, moon, and tides. It is occupied by humanoid nations called Demons, Goblins, Witches, Imps, and Ghouls. But (save that the Demons have small horns growing from their skulls) these folk have nothing to do with

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the supernatural beings denoted by those names in earthly folklore. They are more like barbarian tribes of the post-Roman folk-wandering.

Lessingham alights in Demonland and becomes a passive spectator. He sees the four premier lords of Demonland: the brothers Juss, Spitfire, and Goldry Bluszco and their cousin Brandoch Daha. The author soon drops Lessingham, and we see him no more.

The rest of the book recounts a tremendous war between the Demons and the Witches, the latter under their redoubtable sorcerer-king Gorice XII. The atmosphere is like that of Europe in the Viking Age, with touches of the Renaissance. But everything is more splendid than in any earthly milieu. Characters talk Elizabethan English; they quote Shakespeare, Webster, and other writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as from the ancient Greek.

King Gorice, whose predecessor has been slain in a wrestling match by Goldry Bluszco, captures Goldry. He then ravages Demonland while the other three Demon lords are trying to rescue their comrade. To do this, they must climb the dizzy height of Koshtra Pivrarcha, which they do in a passage to make any acrophobe's viscera turn over. Then they must find and hatch a hippogriff's egg. Juss must fly on the hippogriff to the top of the mountain Zora Rach, where Goldry lies insensible.

After great adventures, battles, and encounters with foes both natural and supernatural, the Demons finally corner Gorice in his castle, Gorice perishes in a last attempt to use his sorcery. His henchmen likewise die, treacherously poisoned by one of their own number.

There is good reason to class this story—nearly 200,000 words long—as the greatest single novel of heroic fantasy. It is told in a marvelous, rolling, blazingly colorful, archaized English, reminiscent of William Morris but more skillfully done.

As more than one critic has said, however, the work is a "flawed masterpiece." If the beginning, with its clumsy device of Lessingham and his hippogriff-chariot, is unsatisfactory, the ending is equally so. When the Witches have been beaten, Juss and his fellows find peace an intolerable bore. So, in answer to Juss's prayer, the gods allow him to turn back time to the beginning and fight the same war over and over again *ad infinitum*. The thought of many readers at this point is: What a fate!

Evidently, the Demon lords —the Good Guys of this novel —fight more for the fun of whacking off arms, legs, and heads than for any humanly rational objective. As for the countless casualties of this ever-recurrent war, nobody gives them a thought.

To Eddision, apparently, war

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was a romantic adventure. This view was widespread in Western culture in Eddison's generation. People born before 1900 still visualized war as fought with bands and banners, and cavalry charging with sword and lance. Not until realisitc accounts of the grimy butchery of the Kaiserian War became current in the 1920s was there a reaction against this attitude.

The four Demon lords are not much developed as characters, save that Brandoch Daha has (if I may mix my allusions) a touch of Celtic *chutzpah*. On the other hand, the lords of Witchland are a fine, well-drawn set of mighty, indomitable, fearless scoundrels. So is Lord Gro of Goblinland, the intellectual *manqué*, whose weakness for lost causes makes him a perennial traitor to whichever side he espouses when that side begins to win.

THE AUTHOR of this work was one of the unlikeliest swashbucklers ever. In 1922, Eric Rücker Eddison (1882-1945) was a 39-year-old British civil servant, born in Yorkshire, who had served in the Board of Trade since 1906. He seems to have been a perfect bureaucrat. So distinguished was his work that in 1924 he was made a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, and in 1929 a Companion of the Order of the Bath. During his last years of public service, 1930-37, Eddison was Deputy Comptroller-General of the Department of Overseas Trade. I suppose that, like others of his class, Eddison went to work every day with bowler hat and umbrella, like every right-thinking British civil servant and businessman.

Outside of his vocation, however, Eddison had shown literary leanings. He began writing stories by the age of ten. In one of these appears a character named Horius Parry, destined to greatness in his later novels. Like William Morris an enthusiast for the Northern Thing, Eddison taught himself Icelandic in order to read the sagas in the original. At Oxford he became devoted to Homer and Sappho.

In 1916, Eddison had privately printed a small book called *Poems, Letters, and Memories of Philip Sidney Nairn*. He had a wife, whom he married in 1909 and with whom he lived happily, and a daughter. He was a mountaineering and wild-life enthusiast.

Following *The Worm Ouroboros*, Eddison issued two more books. The first was a historical novel of the Viking Age, *Styrbiorn the Strong* (1926). After that came his translation of *Egil's Saga* (1930). Then, near the end of his public service, Eddison returned to heroic fantasy with *Mistress of Mistresses, a Vision of Zimiamvia* (1935).

Zimiamvia is briefly mentioned in *The Worm Ouroboros*. Prepar-

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ing to climb Koshtra Pivrarcha, Lord Juss remarks: "That gap hight the Gates of Zimiamvia." When he has climbed the mountain, he tells Brandoch Daha:

"Thou and I, first of the children of men, now behold with living eyes the fabled land of Zimiamvia. Is it true, thinkest thou, which philosophers tell us of that fortunate land: that no mortal foot may tread it, but the blessed souls do inhabit it of the dead that be departed, even they that were great upon earth and did great deeds when they were living, that scorned not earth and the delights and the glories thereof, and yet did justly and were not dastards nor yet oppressors?"

Zimiamvia is mentioned once again in *The Worm*, without details save for its "plains and winding waters and hills and uplands and enchanted woods."[2]

MISTRESS OF MISTRESSES begins with an "Overture," in the form of a monolog by a younger (but still elderly) friend of Edward Lessingham, whom we met at the beginning of *The Worm Ouroboros*. The date is about 1973—our recent past, but several decades in the author's future.

Lessingham, ninety years old but marvelously well-preserved, has just died in his castle in the Lofoten Islands, off the northern coast of Norway. He had built up a little private kingdom there, with its own army. Determined to assert its sovreignty, the Norwegian government had just sent him an ultimatum. Lessingham was prepared forcefully to resist the introduction of modernity into his preserve. While these matters were cooking, he quietly died, seated on a bench with his latest mistress.

As the unnamed narrator muses, we learn more about Lessingham, and still more in later books of the series. He is the sword-and-sorcery hero *par excellence*, making most of the heroes of the genre look like oafs and simpletons. He is the man of the Renaissance squared. Like Lovecraft's Randolph Carter and Howard's Conan, he is an idealization of his creator—the man the author would like to have been.

Six and a half feet tall, with a great black beard, Lessingham combines the qualities of Harald Hardraade, Leonardo da Vinci, and James Bond all in one. A rich, well-born English country gentleman, he is a great soldier, administrator, scholar, sportsman, painter, sculptor, writer, poet, and lover all at once. He rides to the hounds, climbs mountains, and collects art treasures. He beat the Germans in East Africa in the Kaiserian War; he overthrew Bela Kun's Communist rule in Hungary after that war; he once made himself dictator of Paraguay. He has written the definitive biography, in ten volumes, of his an-

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cestor, the Emperor Frederick II.

Nobody has ever approached such omnicompetence in the real world, although a few, like Richard F. Burton, Theodore Roosevelt, and Lord Dunsany have done pretty well. When Eddison set himself to imagine a supermannish *alter ego*, there was nothing petty about his phantasm.

This gargantuan character has studied at Eton, Oxford, and Heidelberg. He has served in the French Foreign Legion. At twenty-five, he marries the beautiful and brilliant Lady Mary Scarnside, daughter of Lord Amnering. Lessingham's marriage is ecstatically happy; a friend tells Mary: "You and Edward are the only married people I've ever known who always seem as if you weren't married at all, but were carrying on some clandestine affair that nobody was supposed to have wind of but yourselves."[3]

After fifteen blissful years, Mary and their only child, a daughter, are killed in a train wreck, Mary had been Lessingham's favorite model for painting; now he destroys all his portraits of her but one. He burns down his stately home, with all its heirlooms and art treasures. He likewise leaves orders with his narrator-friend to burn the Norwegian castle, with its Ming vases, its rugs from Samarkand, and his last portrait of Mary. (A selfish fellow indeed, one thinks, to deprive the world of pleasant things in order to indulge his own solipsistic *hybris*.)

Recovering from his beloved wife's death, Lessingham goes back to his arts, his mistresses, and his adventuring. The reader of *Mistress of Mistresses*, however, drops this Lessingham at the end of the "Overture" and enters another world: Zimiamvia.

This place is described in *The Worm Ouroboros* as a kind of heaven or Valhalla for the souls of dead heroes from the Eddisonian Mercury. The milieu presented in *Mistress of Mistresses* is, however, quite different. Its folk are as mortal as any other, and they include a goodly quota of "dastards and oppressors."

Like Eddison's Mercury, this is a pre-gunpowder, pre-industrial world, but European Renaissance rather than Viking Age. It is like the world of Richard III and Henry VIII of England, Louis XI and François I of France, Emperor Charles V, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Cesare Borgia.

The scene of the tale is a group of lands, cut up by mountain chains and arms of the sea: Fingiswold in the North, Meszria in the South, and Rerek in between. Mezentius, king of these three lands, has recently died.

(The original Mezentius was a legendary Etruscan king, supposed to have been slain in battle by Aeneas. All the charcters in Eddison's story have names of similarly eclectic origins, much as Howard later called his characters by such names as "Demetrio" and

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"Yasmini.")

The common language of Zimiamvia, we are told, is English, of a Shakespearean sort. The characters, however, drop into French, Italian, Latin, or Greek. They often quote from earthly Classical and Renaissance literature.

King Mezentius has left two legitimate children by his late Queen Rosma: a son, Styllis, who has become an arrogant youth; and a daughter, Antiope. By his mistress Amalie, Duchess of Memison, Mezentius has a bastard son, Barganax, Duke of Zayana. Mezentius' vicar in Rerek is the mighty, bull-necked, red-bearded Horius Parry. This man represents the powerful Parry family, noted for vitality, ability, brutality, and unscrupulous perfidy.

Horius Parry has a cousin and ally named Lessingham. To distinguish this Lessingham from the earthly Edward Lessingham—he of the Norwegian castle—I shall call the mundane one Lessingham[1] and the Zimamvian one Lessingham[2].

Lessingham[2] looks much like Lessingham[1] but is more purely a soldier and politician. He has much in common with Duke Barganax, as if both partook of the qualities of Lessingham[1]. But, whereas Lessingham[2] got more than his share of Lessingham[1]'s military virtues, Barganax received the larger portion of his artistic qualities. Barganax is an artist, esthete, and hedonist, albeit he can also buckle a swash or lead a charge when the occasion demands. Although on opposite sides of the conflict, he and Lessingham[2] are drawn to each other.

Barganax has a secretary and ex-tutor, Doctor Vandermast, a wizard who wears a long white beard and quotes Spinoza. In Vandermast's service are two nymphs: Campaspe, who turns herself into a water rat, and Anthea, who now and then becomes a lynx.

The story deals with the efforts of Horius Parry to enlarge his power, and of Barganax and other supporters of the late king to thwart him. Parry has King Styllis poisoned, whereupon Antiope succeeds him. Lessingham[2] loves Antiope.

Himself honorable, Lessingham[2] sticks to his cousin Parry, although he knows what a scoundrel the latter is. He says that he does this because he enjoys the danger and because he deems Parry "a dangerous horse: say I taste a pleasure in such riding."[4]

Parry insults Lessingham[2], threatens him with death, and otherwise abuses him. But not even when Lessingham[2] learns that Parry has been plotting with the vile King Derxis has murdered Lessingham[2]'s sweetheart Antiope. At last Parry has Lessingham, too, murdered, albeit it appears that he will be avenged

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by Barganix. For a man to whom such remarkable gifts are attributed, Lessingham[2] seems to have been a bit stupid in judgments of character.

It is a splendid story, quite different from *The Worm Ouroboros* but almost on a level with it. The reader, however, is liable to confusion among the many characters and the labyrinthine plots and intrigues. The tale reminds me of a remark by an Italian character in one of John Dickson Carr's detective stories: "Italian history, she's-a hot stuff. Everybody stab everybody!" There is no essential connection between this story and *The Worm Ouroboros*, save that they have different characters bearing the common name of Lessingham.

IN 1937 Eddison, now fifty-four, retired from his bureaucratic labors, which during his last three years had included membership in the council of Arts and Industry. He meant, he said, to devote the rest of his life to literature. Having built a new house at Marlborough, in Wiltshire west of London, he lived there quietly with his wife and married daughter until his death in 1945, at sixty-two. His son-in-law was killed, as a member of the Royal Air Force, in the Hitlerian War.

The first fruit of this period of leisure was another novel, *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1941). This is a prequel to *Mistress of Mistresses* (that is, a story of which the previous tale is a sequel) with many of the same characters. Besides making clear many things obscure in *Mistress of Mistresses*, *A Fish Dinner* tells the story of Lessingham[1]. Interspersed with the Zimiamvian sections are passages narrating Lessingham[1]'s youth, his courtship of Lady Mary Scarnside, their married life, and her death.

The Zimiamvian tale, alternating with the mundane, brings in the Jovian King Mezentius; his mistress Amalie, Duchess of Memison; and their youthful son Barganax. By a lover, before she married the first of her three husbands, Queen Rosma had two children, both of whom she would have done away with had not fate preserved them to be reared by others. The elder, Beroald, is Mezentius' chancellor; the younger is the beautiful Fiorinda.

Beroald makes a political marriage for his sister. When this brother-in-law proves unsatisfactory, Beroald has him murdered and finds her another husband, as Cesare Borgia was always doing with his much-put-upon sister Lucrezia. The second husband, Lord Morville, although not a bad man, proves too simple-minded to interest Fiorinda. Bored, she denies him intimacy, although he dotes on her. When poor Morville accuses Fiorinda—prematurely, but not without reasonable grounds for suspicion—of an affair with Barganax, the latter disarms him in a fight. The nymph

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Anthea, in her lynx form, then kills Morville because he had shown the bad judgment of hitting her. Fed up with the married state, Fiorinda refuses to wed Barganax but agrees to become his mistress.

Like Lessingham[2], Mezentius is imcomprehensibly drawn to Horius Parry. The king persists in trying to use the scoundrel as an ally and agent, even when he knows of Parry's plots against him.

The fish dinner of the title occupies the last quarter of the book. The diners are Mezentius, Amalie, Barganax, Fiorinda, Horius Parry, and five others. In the course of conversation, Amalie says: "If we were Gods, able to make worlds and unmake 'em as we list, what world would we have?"[5]

Among the various suggestions, Fiorinda proposes a world that works in strict accord with the laws of cause and effect, without magic or supernatural intervention. Mezentius cups his hands, and an opalescent sphere forms between them. While the diners sit for half an hour, talking and admiring the king's creation, the world he has made—ours—goes through its history of billions of years, from the Archaeozoic seas with their amebalike organisms to the present. Fiorinda suggests that she and Mezentius enter that world and lead the lives of a couple of the natives thereof.

And so it transpires: Mezentius is an incarnation of Zeus—God—and Fiorinda of his created mate, Aphrodite. Since a god can incarnate in more than one mortal body at a time, there is some Zeus in Barganax and in Lessingham[2], and of Aphrodite in Amalie and in the king's daughter Antiope. In our own world, Zeus and Aphrodite incarnate themselves in Lessingham[1] and Mary Scarnside. When dinner in Memison is over and all have had their fun, Fiorinda pricks the shimmering sphere with a hairpin, and it vanishes like a soap-bubble.

When this God takes on a mortal incarnation, it is no gentle-Jesus-meek-and-mild. It is a swaggering, swashbuckling Renaissance bravo, who would as lief hew the head off an ill-wisher as swat a fly. The latent divinity of Lessingham[1] at least makes his godlike achievements more plausible than they would otherwise be, although it seems a little unfair that the rest of us mortals should have to compete with such a demigod. The Goddess, while irresistible by any male on whom she casts an amative glance, has streaks of carpice, mischief, and cruelty, as shown by her treatment of Morville.

Although Eddison's idea is tremendous, *A Fish Dinner*, while very interesting to the critic, is much less successful as fiction than the two previous novels described. The story drowns in talk. Moreover, as if the relationships among the many characters were

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not hard enough to keep track of, the frequent shifts between our own world and that of Zimiamvia further confuses the reader.

AFTER *A Fish Dinner in Memison*, Eddison began another Zimiamvian novel, *The Mezentian Gate*. A meticulous outliner, he had planned the whole work and had written about two fifths of it—the beginning, the end, and a few chapters in between—when he died.

Eddison evidently did not compose a novel straight through from beginning to end, but rather wrote a piece here and a piece there, like a painter filling in different parts of a picture. The incomplete novel, with "arguments" or synopses of the unwritten chapters, was privately published by Eddison's widow in England in 1958. The work was reprinted, along with other novels described here, in Ballantine's paperback series. If Eddison had completed the novel, it would have been even longer than *The Worm Ouroboros*. Even in its present fragmentary form, it is impressive.

The story starts with a "Praeludium: Lessingham on the Raftsund." It begins with the nonagenarian Lessingham[1] in his Norwegian castle, talking with his latest mistress, another incarnation of Aphrodite. He speaks of meeting the Norwegian Air Force in the air, to "give them a keepsake to remember me by."[6] Then, as he sits in the Arctic sun, he dies.

Then back we go to the world of Zimiamvia, with its courts, plots, duels, murders, and battles. The story begins before *A Fish Dinner in Memison* and ends after it, inclosing the other novel as in a frame. The events of *A Fish Dinner*, however, are briefly summarized or alluded to obliquely, since they comprise only a small fraction of the whole tale.

A prince Aktor from Akkama gets into trouble by a love affair with the neglected young wife of King Mardanus of Fingiswold. As a result, Aktor becomes an accomplice to the king's murder and, in remorse, kills himself. Akkama, a bleak and barbarous northern land, serves mainly as a training ground for villains.

Then we learn of the rise of Mardanus' son Mezentius and of his relations with his queen, the big masculine Stateira, who has already had husbands and children. Mezentius crushes a conspiracy headed by Horius Parry. By sheer force of personality, he compels Parry to come over to his side and help in slaughtering the other conspirators.

In the end, at a banquet, Queen Stateira tries to poison Barganax, the bastard son of her husband. In a series of switches of the poisoned cup reminiscent of those in *Hamlet*, King Mezentius drinks the poison. Foiled, the queen finishes off the draft and dies in her turn.

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In its present form, *The Mezentian Gate* suggests the possibility of completion by another hand, as has been done with the unfinished works of other writers. I cannot, however, think of anybody competent for such a task. (I could certainly not do it.) Such a writer should have, not only an exhuberant imagination, great technical skill, plenty of time, and a strong drive, but also an old-fashioned Eton-and-Oxford Classical British upper-class education.

Linear-minded persons like myself may wish to read the story through in chronological order of the events, instead of skipping back and forth in time as the author does. This can be approximated by reading in the following order:

1. *The Mezentian Gate*, without the "Praeludium," Books I to VI.
2. *A Fish Dinner in Memison*, Chapters I to VIII, incl.
3. *The Worm Ouroboros*, considered a dream of Lessingham[1].
4. The rest of *A Fish Dinner in Memison*.
5. The "Praeludium" to *The Mezentian Gate*.
6. The "Overture" to *Mistress of Mistresses*.
7. The rest of *The Mezentian Gate*.
8. *Mistress of Mistresses*, without the "Overture."

Even this scheme will not straighten things out entirely. Perhaps the reader would do as well to read a whole book at a time in any convenient order.

IN JUDGING Eddison's work, one must separate one's literary opinions from those of the author's philosophical and political ideas. Simply as literature, the tetralogy is a monument, although an egregiously imperfect one. *The Worm Ouroboros* is only tenuously connected with the rest. The other three novels are poorly integrated into a whole, and one of them is less than half finished.

Trying to make Eddison's imaginary worlds into a coherent whole merely leaves one more confused than ever. On the theme of worlds-within-worlds, one can see that the world we know is an artifact of the quasi-divine inhabitants of the world of Zimiamvia. Then the world of *The Worm Ouroboros*, being a dream of Lessingham[1] (an incarnation of Mezentius who is an incarnation of Zeus) must be an artifact of this world. But we are told that Zimiamvia is located in the world of *The Worm Ouroboros*. One need not be up on the theory of sets to realize that if A is inside B, and B inside C, C cannot be inside A. Nor is any plausible reason adduced why natives of another world should quote Sappho, Shakespeare, the Elder Edda, and Keats.

As for Eddison's outlook, there are sketches of upper-class English country life, which he evidently knew at first hand, in *A Fish Dinner*. The people express

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the attitudes of their time and place. Since, at the start of this century, Britain ruled not only the seas but a goodly part of the lands as well, this attitude is firmly ethnocentric. There are allusions to "that unsavoury Jew musician" with whom Lessingham[1] had a fight. Another obnoxious character is a "great hulking rascal, sort of half-nigger."

True, there are signs that the extreme British upper-class social exclusiveness is beginning to break down. Before a dinner party, Mary's father says:

" My dear girl, you can't have that dancer woman sit down with us.'

" 'Why not? She's very nice. Perfectly respectable. I think it would be unkind not to. Anybody else would do it.'

" 'It's monstrous, and you're old enough to know better.'

" 'Well, I've asked her, and I've asked him. You can order them both out if you want to make a scene.' "[8]

If Eddison does not share Lord Amnering's prejudice against the Spanish danseuse, he does embrace another conviction of his milieu. Like H. P. Lovecraft, he regarded the English country gentleman as the climax of human evolution, as God's chosen person.

Eddison's characters, especially Lessingham[1], are free with their view of the mass of mankind: "The vast majority of civilized mankind are, politically, a mongrel breed of sheep and monkey: the timidity, the herded idiocy, of the sheep: the cunning, the dissimulation, the ferocity, of the great ape." "Human affairs conducted on the basis of megapolitan civilization are simply not susceptible of good government. You have two choices: tyranny and mob-rule."[9]

The way to handle the masses is that of Zimiamvia, where the strong, the "great," run things as they should be run and take no back talk:

'And yet,' said Melates, 'for less matter, himself hath ere this headed or hanged, in his time, scores of common men.'

'The way of the world,' Barganax said. 'And some will say, the best way too: better a hundred such should die than one great man's hand be hampered.'

When Lessingham[2] is arguing a treaty with Barganax, he reminds the Duke of "our greatness." These great men have a short way with the ungreat who displease them:

Gabriel stood yet in doubt. 'Yet, consider, my lord.-'

Lessingham gave him a sudden look. 'Unless you mean to be kicked,' he said. 'Begone.'

And with great swiftness Gabriel went.[10]

When a lieutenant of

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Lessingham[2] comes to Barganax to try to make peace between them, the Duke orders his men to pitch the intruder off the cliff and is barely dissuaded. When a messenger tells Lessingham[2] of Antiope's murder, Lessingham[2] tries to stab the man to death and just fails to do so. When Doctor Vandermast warns Lessingham[2] that his recklessness will cause his early death, Lessingham[2] nearly throttles the old man before being talked out of it.

In short, Eddison's "great men," even the best of them, are cruel, arrogant bullies. One may admire, in the abstract, the indomitable courage, energy, and ability of such rampant egotists. In the concrete, however, they are like the larger carnivora, best admired with a set of stout bars between them and the viewer.

There is some historical basis for such portrayal of the "great" of earlier times, who serve as models for Eddison's characters. Before the rise of bourgeois democracy, members of ruling classes were much less careful of the feelings of those below them in the scale than is now considered meet. But to ask a modern reader to admire the feudal "insolence of office" is the next thing to asking him to admire heretic-burning, the Roman arena, or cannibalism, all of which have been defended by upright, virtuous men with cogent arguments.

Eddison was not insensible of the worm's eye view:

When lions, eagles, and she-woves are let loose among such weak sheep as for the most part we be, we rightly, for the sake of our continuance, attend rather to their claws, maws, and talons than stay to contemplate their magnificences. We forget, in our necessity lest our flesh become their meat, that they too, ideally and sub specie aeternitatis, *have their places . . . in the hierarchy of true values.*

Still, we have here essentially the ancient idea of the benevolent despot: let the "strong" or "great" man have his way, and he will make the right decisions for all of us. This theory was most recently revived by the European Fascist movements of the 1920s and 30s. It was even superimposed, by Lenin and Stalin, on the nominally egalitarian and democratic Communist movement.

This idea is mere sentimental romanticism. If, under such a regime, people occasionally get a Marcus Aurelius or a Duke Federigo of Urbino, they are much more likely to be saddled with a Caracalla or a Cesare Borgia. While popular rule, forsooth, has often bred follies and outrages, these are petty compared to the enormities of despots.

The theory of *Führerprinzip* is, however, no more naïve than the utopian notions of the modern Left, that all men are born literally equal in ability and that a large, dense population, enjoying

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the benefits of modern science and technology, can ever be a "classless society." Moreover, says Eddison,

A very unearthly character of Zimiamvia lies in the fact that nobody wants to change it. Nobody, that is to say, apart from a few weak natures who fail on their probation. . . . Gabriel Flores, for instance, has no ambition to be Vicar of Rerek: it satisfies his lust for power that he serves a master who commands his dog-like devotion.[11]

In other words, wouldn't it be splendid to be a member of the ruling class (whether called counts, capitalists, or commissars) in a country where the lower orders loyally served and obeyed their betters, without thought of changing either the system or their own status?

The nearest that this ideal has come to realization on this earth is India, with its caste system. The history of India, technologically stagnant and hence perennially conquered by outsiders, gives little cause for enthusiasm. If all mankind were so minded, we should probably still be cowering in caves.

One should not, of course, assume that the author believes everything he makes his characters say. Even when the author's prejudices are patent, as they are with many of the writers dealt with here, that is no reason for not enjoying their tales, provided that the stories are enjoyable: absorbing, colorful, exciting, and stimulating. And all these things, despite their faults, Eddison's four fantasy novels are.

NOTES

1. *The Worm Ouroboros* (1952), p. xv; (1967), p. 1.

2. *Ibid.* (1952), pp. 176, 182, 358; (1967), pp. 212, 219f, 420.

3. *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1968), p. 209.

4. *Mistress of Mistresses* (1967), p. 359.

5. *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1968), p. 247.

6. *The Mezentian Gate* (1958), p. xix; (1969), pp. xxif.

7. *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1968), pp. xviif.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 206, 39.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 211, 284.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 75; *Mistress of Mistresses* (1967), p. 174, 177.

11. *The Mezentian Gate* (1969), pp. xiif.

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Will-O-The-Wisp (Cont. from page 107)

power, Herrick lost his parish and went into exile; when Charles II came to the throne, Herrick returned in triumph to his little church in Devonshire and Prudence returned as his maid. One likes to think that she had shared his exile. She appears in several of his poems, among them an epitaph written many years before she died. Actually, she outlived him by four years, but he liked to write epitaphs.

—THOMAS BURNETT SWANN

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Ted,

I guess the words are "mildly annoyed". I'm more annoyed at Richard Snead for having ripped us off than at you, for having printed "The Kozmic Kid." Though the prose was somewhat verbose at times, there was a certain underlying cleverness about it that made it irresistable. Unfortunately, the drug sequences that were designed to be the most vivid and exciting in the story more often than not bored me. I can marginally accept, as you did in publishing the story, the metaphor of the drug-pinball element as being the fantasy of the story, but still I have the feeling that the story was a rip-off. Not because it didn't say anything; it did. Overall, the story was superb, but not up to the standards I found in the only other piece you've printed that I could compare this with, Jack Dann's "Junction." *There* was a piece! This, I expected a bit more of in the realm of real fantasy. As it was, I could have found it in any mainstream publication that would deliberately refuse to term it fantasy. Don't misunderstand me; I'm glad you printed it. It was one of the better pieces of *fiction* you've published in the last few years. However, *fantasy* or *speculative* fiction? Doubtful. Perhaps with this breakthrough, Richard Snead can continue to turn out more pieces like "The Kozmic Kid." Hopefully, however, he will have more fantastical elements in it than one incidental empath.

TIM RYAN
12425 Vine Maple Drive
Tacoma, Wa. 98499

Let me see, now. . .you're annoyed at Snead for "having ripped us off" with "The Kozmic Kid" and some sequences bored you, but "overall, the story was superb," and you're glad we printed it. I think the words are "mildly confused". . .–TW

Dear Mr. White,

I've been reading FANTASTIC since June 1972 and the best issue so far a has got to be July 1974. I enjoyed every story immensly except for "At Bugs Complete". My favorite story was "Red Moon of Zembabwei" but "The Kozmic Kid" was almost as spectacular. More issues like this one, please!

VON BODENHAUSEN
809 Douglas Dr.
Bellevue, Nebr.

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Dear Ted,

After finishing *Richie*, a downed out story about a decent man killing his son with a target pistol for becoming a drug pusher, I have to admit "The Kozmic Kid" is a breath of fresh air. Regardless of the fact there's still a dispute over what the drug culture is doing to our generation (and that the son was attacking with a bread knife) it really hit the crux of what we are seeking.

Having played pinball recently, I can appreciate the karmic/reincar allusions made to it. Some symbolism. The story also comes off better than "Junction" because it doen't attempt to scoff at the religious heritage of century last (or whenever). It's a period piece—the present—and really comes on strong.

Now, I could say, you call this SF?, but that's begging the issue. Just because it's good doesn't have to mean it can't be SF. (Are there plans for a book here?)

The rest of the issue was average, which is good. I'm beginning to like Conan better, maybe because there's more data on which to base a judgment about where the stories are leading. Short piece "The Stronghold" was most interesting myth-telling of its kind, but average at best. The Bunch a typical Bunch story. "Track Two": Does Barry really think it hasn't been said before? If not, why the hell bother?

Lettercol seemingly well-balanced. (Not like *Analog*, which I feel is overly dependent on editorials which have little to directly do with SF.)

ROY J. SCHENCK
R.D. #1, Canisteo
New York, 14823

Could we call "The Kozmic Kid" sf? Depends on what those two letters stand for—try the phrase used in the blurb: "subjective fantasy"—TW

Dear Ted,

This time, congratulations to you and (more importantly) Richard Snead, for the appearance of "The Kozmic Kid" in the July FANTASTIC. Although I'm only passing familiar with the fantasy genre (and I don't believe in iron-clad categories, either), Snead seems to have touched upon the real potential of the fantasy form: the *psychological* experience.

Most fantasy, as I see it, reveals its metaphysics through *action*, i.e., wizards conjure, doppelgangers appear, capricious metamorphisms descend upon people. . .and the like. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is certainly constraining. Sword-and-sorcery makes endless use of this strategy. Only occasionally does the fantasy come alive—as with Tolkien, or Poul Anderson. But these superior cases generally rely on psychological leverage of one kind or another. Tolkien created *noble* characters; Anderson pulls you *into* the minds of his brooding Norsemen. The real fantasy-feast, though, occurs *in* the mind. It happens when the reader can no longer distinguish between the reality of the mind, and the reality of the outside world. This is where Snead really sings.

In "The Kozmic Kid," it is not clear whether the narrator and the Kid are simply living a stoned trip—or whether they were sliding through an ominously *different* reality. As though it were, in the narrator's words, "some other level of the experience that slipped right by me and kept on going." This makes the fantasy very effective, because the lines between Objective and

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Subjective are erased, and the reader must proceed without guidance into the ambiguity of the story. One is left feeling quite unreal.

This ambiguity, however, cuts both ways. Snead introduces a lot of things that never get resolved: (1) the philosophising in part III; (2) the constant reference to "seeing", especially in connection with The Man In The Freeway; (3) the weird situation vis-a-vis Sam and Roxanne; and (4) the Kid's final, unexplained, strung-out death. As a stoned experience, maybe this is okay, but as a *story*, these things should be resolved—not just dropped. At least, resolved in the sense that their appearance is integrated *into* the story. I don't mind an enigma hovering at the end, but let's be tidy and have it hover at the *end*, instead of being sprinkled throughout the rest of the story.

Snead's interpretation of the stoned experience is very convincing and authentic. So also, the dialog. And the pinball metaphor was great; too bad the story didn't cohere under the metaphor, more than it did. —But don't get me wrong; it's the best story I've read in months!

Now, the residual stuff:

Conan. . .Not bad, but more thanks to DeCamp, than Carter.

Malzberg. . .I missed the point, but I'm beginning to appreciate him.

Geston. . .A good mood piece and very suggestive, toward the end, but—Goddammit!—there should have been more. Geston can write well enough to have developed the story more than he did.

Bunch. . .Cheap polemics. Hell, it was hardly a story—just thinly-clothed guerilla theater. The Lowest Form Of Art. I'm beginning to get royally pissed at stories that (1) insult my intelligence by beating me over the head with obvious and/or puerile moralisms and social observations, and (2) are more intent on Message, than creating an emotional/aesthetic experience for the reader.

Just keep serving 'em up.

MIKE DUNN
5600 University Way NE, #8
Seattle, WA, 98105

Dear Mr. White,

While I do not take exception to Harlan Ellison's diatribe (According to You, July 1974) on a personal level (being something of a "fan", and long-time reader of FANTASTIC and AMAZING), I feel compelled to write for Harlan's own sake. (After all, the implication that fans are slow-witted and poor readers is surely based on his own vast experience as a fan. . .) His incredibly paranoid and personal response to such a minor cavil seems to indicate an even more serious mental imbalance than I had heretofore suspected.

There appears to be quite a stir in the field (still!) over the label "science fiction", but the literary elite of the mainstream will be more likely to respond to a better standard of writing, rather than a new wrapping on the old package (re Barry Malzberg's comment about "best" works of recent years in the letter following Ellison's). If not, then it's their loss, but such a rabid reaction to a possibly mis-attributed remark or label is unbecoming a writer of Ellison's stature; one way for the field to indicate its maturity is for its writers to act in a mature manner. Hopefully, Harlan is just building up an emotional overload to write his

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all-time masterwork and set the pace for a new series of "bests"; if not, I hope he has himself institutionalized; then, when he feels better, he can resume his life on the outside, an option he may not have if he continues in his present state of mind. . .

Perhaps Mr. Ellison should have kept his "corroded Arabian oil lamp" and used it himself; judging from the vindictive tone of his letter he'd fit right in with the rest of the White House personnel.

BILL JOHNSTON
223 W. Rillito St.
Tucson, AZ 85705

Before publishing his letter I wrote to Harlan to suggest he might want to rewrite it after a chance for calm reflection and gave him my deadline for such a revision; failing that, I said, I would publish his original letter complete and as written. Hearing nothing further from him at deadline time, I published his original letter as requested therein. A recently-received postcard from him says, in part, "Damnably belated, a response to yours of 20 Feb 74. Don't ask. Aggravation, TV lunacy, work overloads, 3½ weeks in NYC on business. Meant to get off a note saying you could forget running my letter, but let it slide—you know the Syndrome—and of course it's in print now. As long as it's done, let's let it lie and consider matters closed. But you might advise [Wayne W. Martin] who took me to task for the number of awards I've won that it's a big world outside sf and an Edgar and 3 WGAw awards count, too." Writing a fiery letter in the heat of the moment, only to regret it later, is a problem I've shared with Harlan and can sympathize with. Hopefully, the matter ends here.—TW

Dear Ted,

With your May 1974 FANTASTIC editorial you have underlined once more the lonely and very special lesson you teach to your readers with every issue of both of your magazines, i.e. that artistic achievement is the territory of human beings, not of machines nor of organizations. It is refreshing to pick up a magazine upon which the construction marks of its creators are so indelibly stamped. It seems that for so many years the thrust of human endeavor was to create artifacts so refined as to leave no trace of the hands that in reality formed them. Alas, in the twentieth century we have reached that goal in many of our arts by the development of technologies which enable the artists to polish away the last fingerprint and present to us their pure and sterile visions.

Of course the technology has its place. Obviously, without the offset press and modern papers and inks your magazines probably would not exist in their current form. Without the press-on lettering and the graphic art films and cameras to enlarge or reduce the lettering, you would not have the freedom that leads to such exquisite solutions to the task of utilizing the graphic arts to satisfy the needs of the magazines, which are ultimately and obviously commercial ventures.

My point is that through all the technology, AMAZING/FANTASTIC have managed to keep the people, the artists, whether of pen or brush or Zip-a-tone or whatever, clearly in the focus. In a society that prints painting reproductions by the millions on brush-textured cardboard and teaches its children that music comes from electronic machines, the value of

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publication which acknowledges its origins in the endeavors of human beings is almost beyond reckoning. This is the real value of the magazines, and the fact that they attract and publish the work of artists done "primarily for their own satisfaction" shows that the artists recognize and appreciate the climate you have created thereby.

I am uncertain exactly how to terminate this soliloquy, other than to say that I enjoy both magazines immensely and wish you long and increasing success with them.

JOHN W. KINNEY, JR.
3027 Omah Street
Durham, N.C. 27705

Dear Ted,

To quote, if I may, from your July '74 editorial concerning inflation and the President: "It has been said entirely too often that our nation could not easily accept the disruption of a presidential impeachment." You then went on to show how, in this case at least, the country cannot stand *not* to throw the rascal and his shabby policies out the door.

Like so many other people, the question of the implications of presidential impeachment have been on my mind quite often in the past few months, ever since it became obvious that the process was beginning to be seriously considered, and I've come to the conclusion that the tool of impeachment is one that has been used too sparingly in the past. After all, what is to stop a president, especially one as popular as Richard M. Nixon was before the shit hit the fan, from undertaking such clandestine operations, when he knows that the chances of his being removed from office are negligible?

If, on the other hand, the official in question knows that any severe betrayal of the public trust, whether or not said action be in violation of the law, is likely to bring ouster, perhaps that official will hesitate before game-playing with his office. This is no more applicable than now, where any executive culpability, if existant, is well hidden, and the only real bitch tied to the Man himself is his refusal to cooperate with the courts, Congress and even his own prosecutor, his lack of a moral fiber compatable with the job, and his serious breachment of public confidence. These alone are violations of the spirit and purpose of an office of leadership, and as such constitute a state worthy of the removal of the cause. Unfortunately, today's Constitution interpreters do not agree.

Would a Congress, unafraid of impeachment after the hoped-for precident is set, then everuse and misuse the power? Perhaps, though I doubt that a state comparable to Britainic or Canadian parliment would be reached, where a high office holder would be cast down solely because of opposition to his policies. The benefits though, such as removing the charisma attached to the office and bringing the president down to earth, are tantalizing.

The present deplorable state is the alternative.

BILL SMEE
416 W. Lexington Ave
Elkhart, IN 46514

As of this writing (mid-July) impeachment is seen as a foregone conclusion, and conviction in the Senate a strong possibility. The continued revelations (transcripts, portions censored from transcripts by

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Nixon but released by other sources, convictions of his henchmen, etc.) paint a picture of unrivalled moral corruption in the White House and more than hint at a variety of criminal actions initiated or condoned by the President. It is in the best interests of the nation that this matter be resolved speedily and responsible leadership restored.–TW

Ted—

FANTASTIC, at 75¢, remains the best magazine of its kind, and the best buy for the reader who wants the melange of story, article, and comment it has to offer. Nobody else *has* it. (So much for the problem of will-we-keep-buying; besides, with the *Wall Street Journal* and *TV Guide* raising their prices, the trend seems to have reached all levels of magazine and newspaper publishing.)

The hows and whys of increased paper, food, gas, etc. costs can be argued back and forth until the price-supported dairy cows come home. It would be easy to say that it's *not* Nixon's fault—that you just don't *understand* how things are—but that would be (first) an oversimplification and (second) an insult to your intelligence.

As it happens, I also happen to consider the idea that it's *all* Nixon's fault to be (first) and (second), as above. Hence, something of a short rebuttal to the July Editorial, part 2:

That Nixon's "corrupt presidency is directly related to the economic chaos we are now struggling against" would be a reasonable conclusion if the United States had an extraordinarily high rate of inflation among the nations of the world is unavoidable. However, it just ain't so. France, England, and West Germany all had similar rates of inflation for 1973 None of them had Nixon as head c government.

(By the same token, they've all hac executive turnovers attributable t economic factors over the past couple of years. Why? Perhaps because *somebody* has to take the blame—anc voters tend to believe it's easier t get rid of one corrupt department b getting rid of one big man, than t clean out another department o government by dumping hundreds o legislators.)

Ted, don't fall victim to scapegoa logic. Even the removal of so critica a figure as a President won't solve th problem of government consortin with special interests. Most o Congress is beholden to suc interests. Without pressure o Congressional figures, specia interests could never push throug deals to support dairy interests, suga interests, gun interests, etc.

To solve the problem, we'll have t get rid of *all* those pressures, not jus one man. To further your analogy removing the cancer of Richard Nixo won't guarantee governmental health Indeed, the benign surgery o impeachment can only help furthe the malignancy of special interes pressures, because after impeachmen we'd all probably heave a sigh o relief and assume the problem wa solved.

Though Congress may impeach anc convict, it's not about to do anythin about the real problem (in this case) no cancer cures itself. Indeed Congress has helped push through a much useless inflation, if not more than Nixon can be held accountabl for. So, on this matter of economics let's get off the President's back!

Let's push for campaig

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reform—including a Constitutional amendment, if legislators won't respond.

Let's push for campaign reform—including a Constitutional amendment, if legislators won't respond.

Let's put aside these personal vendettas, this trend toward scapegoat-ism, so we can judge the facts clearly and reasonably.

And let's get on with the business of running this country—and impeaching Richard Nixon for what he *can* be held accountable.

. . . Uh, did I say a *short* rebuttal?

After all that it may seem out of place, but I think most writers would agree that you deserve a round of applause for the *rest* of the July Editorial. In the somewhat esoteric fields of sf and mystery—and the seemingly mystic world of comics—the new writer *has to* learn the basic ground rules of professional submission to think seriously of his writing, and often even a professional writers' group can't provide those ground rules. Compared to writing for denominationals, for example, sf is another world.

Once he *has* the background, though, the professional writers' club is the best thing that can happen to a new writer. He gets professional criticism—gets a chance to see the work of other writers—gets a better view of *all* the forms writing can take—and, most importantly, gets to feel he's a part of the "writing world", with all its infinite subdivisions.

When he gets to feeling like that, he *knows* he's a writer—and that can only be good news. Thanks, Ted.

FRANK HAYES III
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Moline, IL 61265

For better or worse, the President of the United States sets this country's economic policy–or allows none to be set. The series of price and wage controls Nixon created and disbanded over the past several years are one example. It is probably not fair to blame everything *on the man, but he* can *be blamed for the now-evident attitudes he has brought to bear upon these problems.*—TW

Dear Mr. White:

I have just—six hours ago—received the July FANTASTIC. As usual I started by reading the editorial and then moved on to the letter column. After reading the first paragraph of the first letter, I realized it wasn't the one from Malzberg, but some hot shot. I flipped the page and noticed the Ellison monicker. I read his somewhat amusing comments, went on to the Malzberg letter and then upon the Priest comment. By this time I assumed that this was going to be an all celebrity letter column, but then I came upon the Moffit letter and had that quelched.

I read the first paragraph on the next letter and thought; "That seems rather familar." I thought you might have mistakenly reprinted a letter from the previous issue, so I turned the page to see my name staring me in the face. "So that's where I heard it," thinks I. I stared blankly for no less than five minutes. If this is how I take having a letter published, I may not survive if I ever sell a story.

Have you had heart failure? I came too close for a boy of my tender age (but I won't say how tender). There's something eerie about seeing your name in print for the first time (excepting newspapers) even if only on a letter. This no doubt sounds silly

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to those who have had the experience several times, but that first one gets you, particularly when you don't actually expect it.

I don't want to bore you with this anymore, so I'll move on. I got to thinking as the result of this. What made him decide to print my letter? What prompted him to print the parts he did and to leave out the parts he did. Well in my case I could see obvious reasons for the parts left out. They were only parts that I simply expressed agreement with previous statements or stated simply that I did or did not like something else, without stated reason. That still leaves the why for what you did print. I take it that the main reason for its inclusion was the question about obtaining the Aldiss serial, giving a lead in for stating the why.

The rest of the letter still holds the why. The answer is yours, for I assume you are the only that knows for sure, but the why question led me into the eerie question of *what*? What would have gone into that space if I hadn't written that letter. It gives one a shiver when, for the first time, he realizes that he has effected the content of magazine to the extent, in this case, of about a page and a half. Somewhere there is a page and a half of material that would now be in print if you hadn't written that letter. Is there a short-short that won't be bought to fill an issue maybe six months from now because your letter shoved another letter an issue latter which eventually leads to not needing the short? Is there someone else's letter that will never see print because of yours? Is there an ad that was left out (this being the least likely of any possibilities).

In all, what leads to the ominous decision of what sees print and what don't. Previously I seriously doubted that you even finished reading my letters. Well enough of that.

That Ellison letter. I don't know where he hid his brain while writing it, but. . . Who cares what's on sale in Pago Pago except those in Pago Pago. It really had nothing to do with the point and he admitted as much. "Just a thought." he said. Not much of one I would say. I don't know if this exchange is really just kidding, an inside joke among friends, or if this might be one of those feuds you mentioned in the editorial.

Anyway I'm pissed off with Ellison's bit on Buck Rogers. This has long been a sore point with me. Buck Rogers, I dare say, in its novel form about "Anthony Rogers" has proven to be a highly accurate predictor of many scientific advances and is far more believable than the bulk of Ellison's writing.

I notice that John Berry is gone from the editorial credits and is replaced by Terry Hughes. I'm sure many readers are wondering what prompted this change and I'm equally sure many of them will be writing to ask why. I hope you choose to answer one of them. At the same time, you might clear something else up. It has been made clear, by you, that one of Grant Carrington's main functions is reading the slush pile and that Moshe Feder helps out in that department. I have never noticed however any mention of what John Berry's editorial function was. Whatever they were, I assume they will now fall to Mr. Hughes. Maybe in part of your editorial or somewhere you explain his new functions and maybe at the same time go into Moshe Feder's primary duties.

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What has ever happened to all of the old regulars that use to appear all the time in your letter columns? After seeing my letter in print, I went back and reread the letter columns of FANTASTIC & AMAZING and I noticed a lot of people missing today. Of course we've got Lester Boutillier a lot today but there have been some strange disappearances. We all know where Cy Chauvin has disappeared to, but where is Jerry Lapidus keeping himself these days? I don't remember seeing anything from him since the June '73 AMAZING. And where has Dave Hulvey buried himself? There are a few others who have been conspicuously absent recently, but I think you have the idea now. What happened to them?

A while back John Robinson (he hasn't been around since Jan. '74 and not to often in the months before) was talking about an award, to correspond to the H.P. Letterhack award he proclaimed, for letter writers to the prozines. If he decided to proclaim such an award, he would be hard put to find a deserving honoree.

The AMAZING & FANTASTIC columns are the only ones of any merit at all and there aren't many regulars to pick from. For 1973 the award would have to go to Lester Boutillier by default and considering the smallness of field you couldn't disqualify winners from the next years competition without destroying any kind of possible competition.

For 1974 Lester Boutillier would look to be a leading contender again with David Taggart the main competition so far. Things would look a lot better if the vanished writers I've mentioned would start writing again to your columns.

By the way, isn't about time for John Robinson to be announcing his next selection for the H.P. Letterhack award?

About part of your editorial: the House did not in fact vote impeachment by the time we got to read your remarks, however, the transcripts have been made public and many leading Republicans are now calling for his resignation as are many traditionally Republican newspapers, with many calling impeachment. You may be feeling pretty good about being one of the first magazine or paper editors to do so. It seems odd, the White House, after all they've pulled in the past, want the American people to take their word for it when they say the transcripts are the complete, true story of Watergate. They will permit the ranking members of the House Judiciary Committee to "listen" to the tapes to confirm their validity, but won't permit experts to check and make sure the tapes themselves are authentic, untampered with. They expect us to take their word for it. They say that what has been made public proves they aren't trying to hide anything. As I see it, if they are willing to admit to Nixon's behavior in such a bad manner, admitting to what they have, I shudder to think of the kind of things they may be trying to hide behind it. To make such things public, they have to be trying to hide something much worse.

Nixon keeps saying he has not committed an impeachable offense, that criminal offenses are the only impeachable offenses. Then he violates supoenas. I disagree with his definition of an impeachable offense, but even if his point were correct, it doesn't take a constitutional lawyer to

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tell you that obstruction of justice and witholding evidence are crimes.

Well that's about it for this go 'round.

WAYNE W. MARTIN
Rte. 1, Box D-64
Macclenny, Florida 32063

The issue is made up this way: stories are selected, copyedited and blurbed first; features are done next. The editorial and letters are done last. The letters are assembled out of those on hand and the length of the letter column is arrived at by "guestimate"; if we have more material set in type than will fit into an issue, the letters are usually cut back to fit. I try to assemble a letters column in which balance is achieved between topics and tone and in which the column functions as a forum for the readers. As for the duties of our editorial staff, Moshe Feder was originally a replacement for Alan Shaw, who was (during my editorship) our first proofreader. Feder is now an assistant to the Publisher, handling a variety of tasks which come up, due to the fact that he lives in New York City. John Berry replaced him as proofreader, and was in turn replaced by Terry Hughes. It is to my advantage to have the proofreader located in my area, which both Berry and Hughes have been. As for the letterhacks of yesterday, perhaps your query will prompt a response from some of them.—TW

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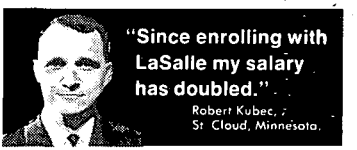

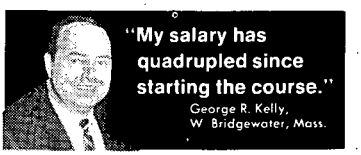

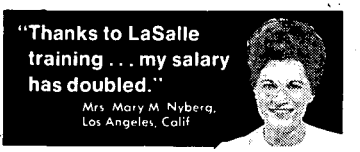

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